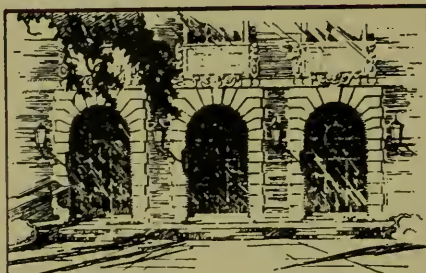


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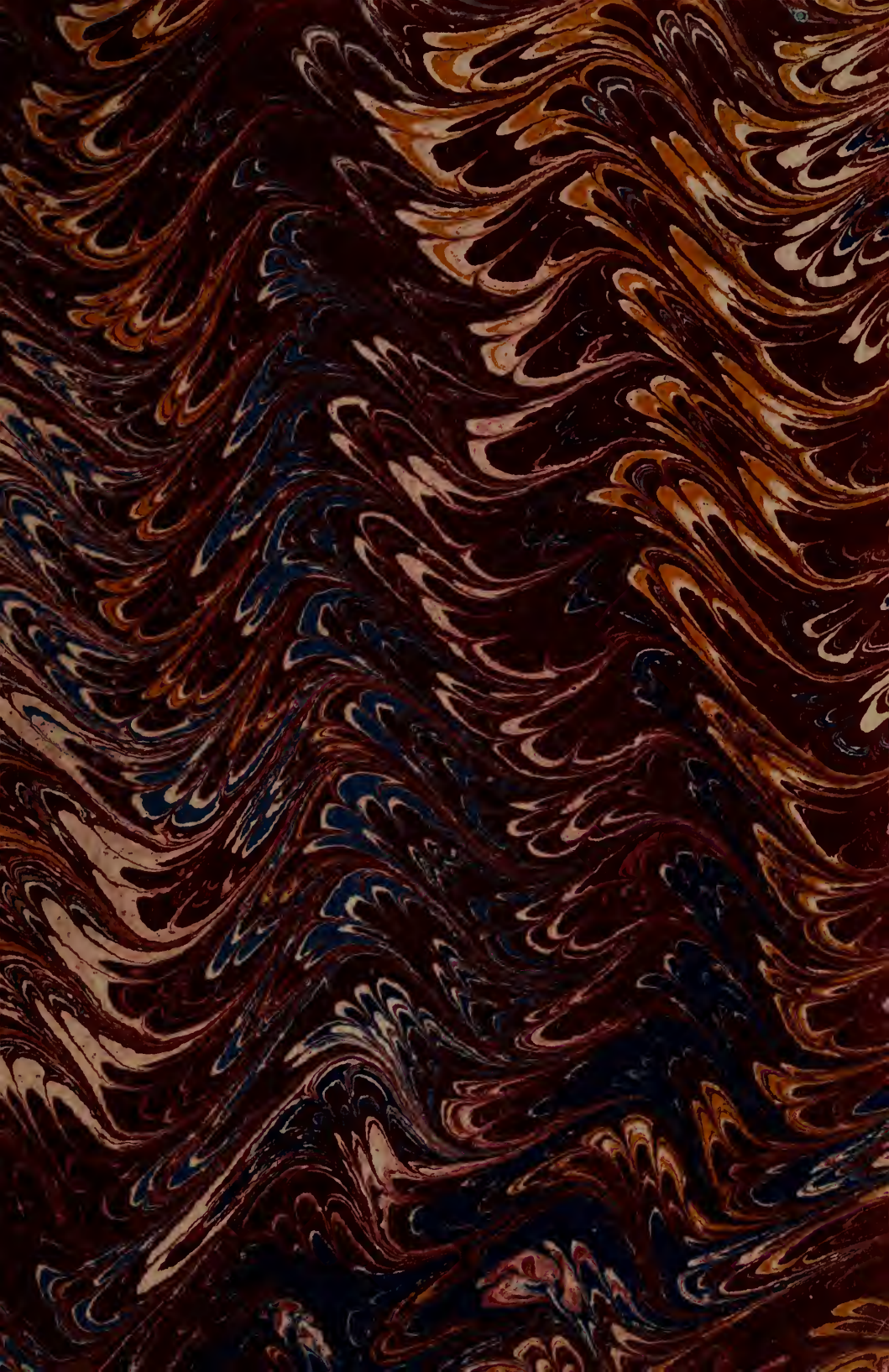


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I V Y :
COUSIN AND BRIDE.

VOL. II.

IVY:
COUSIN AND BRIDE.

BY

PERCY GREG

AUTHOR OF

“ACROSS THE ZODIAC,” “ERRANT,”

&c., &c.

“For Love himself took part against himself.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1881.

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I V Y.



CHAPTER I.

ASTRAY.

ETHERT hardly knew all the motives that led him to prefer the garden, to select the Eastern terrace in full view of the house for the coming interview with his bride. But he knew how easily, certainly, and deeply anything like coolness or repulsion on his side would wound her whom he honestly and earnestly desired to spare, and wished that the place and conditions of their meeting should be such as obviously to preclude any demonstration of tenderness. He understood as few men could have done the beauty, purity, and sweetness of his cousin's nature; indeed he alone had had

the chance of understanding it, he alone had ever penetrated beyond the fragile outer shell of graceful, silent, shy commonplace formed over that delicate, tender, refined loving spirit by the formal instruction of the school-room, and the accidental training of circumstances and surroundings. With him alone Ivy had learned to converse; he alone had ever drawn out her mind, giving her confidence to think by giving her encouragement to talk in the assurance that she would find a willing and interested listener.

Ethert never, if he could help it, snubbed even a child's questions with the selfish idleness of the common answer, "You can't understand it;" an answer which almost always means, "I won't take the trouble, first to make it out myself, and then to explain it to you." And by some native instinct of absolute innocence, Ivy never approached the few questions to which no other answer can be given in a child's hearing. He had been therefore the recipient of her thoughts, the confidant even of her waking dreams. She had spoken all the more trustfully, the more freely to him

that she spoke so little to any other ; and Ethert alone could have told that she had anything to say.

Perhaps he understood her the more fully that he had done so much, consciously and unconsciously, to mould and direct her growing intelligence. His books were, as she had said, often beyond her comprehension ; but being his, she could not bear to lay them aside, and learnt from them very much more than she herself was aware. Above all, she had learnt from them to study, and not merely to read. Striving to see what Ethert meant, she gained the habit of seeking to master the sense of other writers, instead of passively taking in their words, to remember or to forget as might happen. Her introduction to *Meta*, mere child as the latter was, had again assisted to quicken the action of her mind, to teach her to compare and criticise ; for Ethert constantly thought aloud to his infant ward, and thus unintentionally gave her what three-fourths of her sex never acquire their whole life long—a perception of the nature and working of the intellectual machinery, even a glimpse of the methods of the creative imagination. But

it was not Ethert's intellect that had enabled him to dominate Ivy's spirit, and in much to mould her character. It was well for her that he was a writer of elegance and a poet of almost fantastic purity. For whatever Ethert thought and wrote would needs have formed her first original standard of excellence.

And Ethert's was, with all its faults, one of the few masculine characters that could have done justice to Ivy's, that could have realized the exquisite delicacy and beauty of a nature whereof the lily of poetry is the true emblem—"the lily that dies of a stain." Had the danger of so terrible a revelation threatened any other girl, Ethert might have regarded it differently. Certainly he contemplated the possibility of such a shock, a stain to her ideal innocence, as very few men would regard the prospect of such a disclosure to a young maiden; with a horror which probably few maidens deserve that men should feel. It would have seemed to him like the destruction before his eyes of some choice, precious, absolutely irreplaceable creation of ancient art, but a creation endowed with a soul capable of suffering in

being thus shattered. It seemed to him that, after the inmost shrine of that virgin nature had been so roughly profaned, it could never again be the same; its sanctity, its beauty, would not merely be desecrated but destroyed.

On the other hand, the same feeling of reverence for that ideal purity made the step by which he had been forced to protect it the more intensely abhorrent. An enforced marriage would in his view have been an outrage hardly to be suggested to any young girl; to Ivy one which, as we have seen, he simply could not himself suggest, which it shocked and pained him to permit another to propose. But while he appreciated, realized the innocence that was not mere ignorance but instinctive repulsion of every shadow of evil, Ethert was—as those who have eaten of the forbidden fruit, have listened to the voice of the serpent, must ever be—unable fully and clearly to comprehend what must be passing in such a mind; and one practical mistake, the source directly or indirectly of much needless pain to both, was due to this inevitable divergence of manhood's inferences and maidenhood's actual imaginings.

The one thing that did not and could not occur to him was what—so far at least—was really Ivy's wish and expectation. The chill, the constraint, the estrangement that had come between them, whereof—unknown to her—the suggestion of this marriage had been the cause, had deeply pained and perplexed her. But even this she would have been content to forget, content to forego explanation; only hoping, and from time to time believing, that now at least whatever had grieved or angered Ethert was forgiven; wishing only that he would treat her as he had always done, that she might be once more the favourite cousin, the trusted and trusting friend, might find in him the affectionate, gentle, ever attentive and considerate counsellor, companion, and protector she had looked up to and relied on from her cradle. The one thing she wished and expected, in a word, was that they should be, as surely they still were, intimates and cousins; and this was of course the one thing to Ethert simply and obviously impossible. Thus in the present anomalous situation, as ever since the first fatal hint of the lawyer, they were at cross purposes, and seemed

too likely to be at cross purposes throughout.

Unable to meet her as he would have done six months ago, as she was prepared and wishful to find him, he considered somewhat anxiously—fearing every moment to see her slender figure, whose mourning drapery so sadly contrasted that in which he recently remembered her, and so oppressed his spirit, emerge from the hushed and darkened house—how he could render that meeting the least painful to both. Pausing in his walk to and fro at the top of the steps, he observed at some distance in the flower-garden below a few winter flowers still lingering, a few spring blossoms early opened in sheltered nooks, familiar favourites of Ivy's as of his own.

The associations recalled by the sight suggested an attention which might perhaps be the easiest means of veiling the awkwardness of the first greeting. He had gathered and arranged the flowers amid green fronds of fern into a little bouquet, and had again reached the foot of the steps, when looking up he saw the expected figure on the terrace. If the memory of their

last meeting at that point some weeks before flashed for a moment across his mind, it impressed itself more forcibly, dwelt longer and more deeply on hers.

A very trifle, but a characteristic trifle revealed to Ethert how little she was disposed even now to resent the coldness she could not but have felt in their last parting. Instead of awaiting him on the terrace, she descended to meet him, not as on the former occasion, quickly, confidently, joyously, but with slow, hesitating movement and timid, well-nigh shrinking demeanour. Turning her questioning, almost beseeching looks to his countenance as he came forward to meet her, promptly but gravely and quietly, she felt at once through all her nature the completeness of the change that had passed between them. Her only comfort at that moment lay in a half-consciousness of her own constrained manner; in an inference, felt not reasoned, that his constraint might be, like hers, the effect of mere embarrassment, not of coldness nor unkindness.

Yet as the flowers were given, the "good morning" spoken, Ivy was inexpressibly chilled,

almost stung, by the vivid painful contrast between the present and the recent well-remembered past. Why was it, she thought—always anxious to take blame to herself rather than to lay it on him—why was it that the bride should feel so acutely the omissions which the cousin could have met with playful reproach as mere forgetfulness? Why was it that as she turned back with him she strove in vain to speak? She could not, happily, understand herself or him; but she walked beside him the whole length of the terrace in silence, unable to lay her trembling hand on his arm as of old, to draw close to his side as she had been wont. It was in low faltering tones that she spoke at last.

“Ethert, you do not mean—Mamma says you talk of going back to town. Surely you will not, you cannot leave me in trouble and sorrow, and so soon after....after yesterday? It is not like you—and...it is so strange, so sad. Ethert, will you not....do give me a little time.”

The words were most unfortunate in their ambiguity. It was natural that Ivy should use them in one sense; almost as natural that Ethert

should understand them in another. His answer certainly was not meant to be unkind.

"I thought that was just what I was doing."

"I did not mean that," she answered hastily, understanding but half his meaning, yet much hurt by the misconception, and still more by the tone in which he spoke. "We are cousins still, surely. Can you not spare me now a few days of the tenderness, the kindness you always showed your cousin till....till the day after we met here a few weeks ago? You have never been the same to me since that day, except now and then for a few minutes. Why, Ethert? do tell me! What could I have done to offend, to displease you?"

This renewal of the question perplexed him not a little. He could not again meet it with a mere refusal to answer; but truthful explanation seemed even more impossible.

"It was then," he answered, with a hasty attempt at evasion, "that I was first reminded that my cousin was a child no longer."

"But," Ivy returned quickly, "she was your cousin still! Ethert"—she faltered, a painful colour suffusing the pale cheek that seldom

blushed so deeply with natural ease—"you cannot mean that I was....who reminded you, and what was said? Not Mamma—she would have spoken to *me*; and if she did not, who had a right to find fault? What *do* you mean?"

Ethert felt at once the full extent of his blunder. Direct falsehood generally answers better than equivocation. Either may serve their purpose between those who are not intimate enough to press home a question evidently unwelcome. But between intimate friends or near relatives, equivocation ever defeats its own end, when that end is the avoidance of the pain which the truth might give. Wishing simply to escape the necessity of fixing Ivy's attention on the change of manner which had so much hurt her, which had dwelt so long in her memory, by a direct refusal to explain, he had contrived to wound her most cruelly and, as it seemed to her, most wantonly. For both knew that his answer was not, could not be frankly and wholly truthful.

Their cousinhood had always belonged to that closer form of the relation which in some

families is scarcely less close or less secure than that of brother and sister. Their several ages had contributed to render his manner and conduct towards her those of fraternal affection. Nor would anything but the one suggestion that is necessarily fatal to such intimacy have interrupted the ease of their intercourse. Conscious of this, fully assured that her mother had known, observed, and approved the terms on which they had stood, Ivy was cruelly, keenly stung by what she understood as a reproach, however unintentional—an intimation that Ethert had in that painfully-remembered visit felt and acted on a necessity of reserve which had not occurred to herself.

Their new relation rendered such a hint from his lips, now that they first spoke together as husband and wife, peculiarly galling, intolerably humiliating. Ethert, perceiving how his excuse had been understood, inwardly and intensely cursing his own stupidity and want of tact, hastily endeavoured to explain away his explanation.

“You know there are things I cannot tell

you, that there is, that there always has been, a painful secret. But—what I meant was... then, Ivy, then it was that I had the first hint that...that any one could wish us more than cousins."

The usual penalty of insincerity had overtaken him. At every word he was floundering deeper into the quicksands of evasion and obvious unreality, at every word giving fresh pain of the kind he could least endure to inflict.

"And it was *that*?" Ivy said slowly, in a tone that told at once how deep the unintended stab had gone. "You were cold to your cousin that you might show how ill you could bear to call her—your wife!"

In his bitterest and least rational mood, Ethert retained a gentleman's reverence for feminine self-respect, even in the least estimable of the sex. He would not willingly have betrayed to any woman that her hand had been tendered and refused; and least of all women could he have borne so to wound Ivy, of whose maiden pride and delicacy, of whose dignity as woman and wife he was

jealously heedful. It was by sheer ill-luck that he had managed in two successive sentences to inflict two distinct and cruel wounds upon her feelings, and he felt them both almost as keenly as she did.

"It was but a hint," he said, almost stammering in his perplexity and distress. "And Ivy, what angered me was... it was not that I should seek you for yourself—but for the money you would bring me."

She started. "But you knew," she said presently, "that while Charlie lived I had none."

"I cannot explain, Ivy. It was put to me in that way."

"But how could it, Ethert? It was while you were here that Mamma spoke of the position in which I should be left—that Papa had saved so little for me."

The doubt she appeared to imply, the extreme awkwardness of the position in which he had entangled himself, gave a tone of unintentional irritation to his reply:

"You knew from the first there were things I could not explain. On that account I asked you to obey without reasons. But,

Ivy, I will not ask you to trust. Believe me a liar if you choose."

"Ethert, how can you say such a thing to me?" she exclaimed, her eyes filling with tears: "to me who always trusted you with all my heart! Did I not believe you when—was it not because I trusted you that I obeyed my mother when—no, she would not tell me to obey, she would not command—but I gave up asking why, when she said you thought it best, you wished it."

She had not meant to remind him—present as the fact was to her own consciousness—that she had yielded to his counsel and his will rather than to her mother's; but he accepted her words in that sense, and instantly repudiated the suggestion.

"Ivy, you should not say that. Remember what I asked you before it was too late—was it really your own doing? If you had spoken then of command or obedience, you would have been free at once. I had insisted that you should not be forced or overborne, and you assured me that it was not so."

"I said I would do what you wished," she

replied, bewildered, distressed, and almost terrified.

But the responsibility thus thrown on him—the very burden he had so resolutely refused to assume—was too intolerable to allow Ethert to speak with his usual gentleness and consideration.

“Ivy, that cannot pass. I will not be told that I am answerable for your choice, that I pressed or counselled you; you know better. Much as it wounded me to treat you so discourteously, I would not even ask, lest I should seem to influence or mislead. You know that at the last I showed you, urged on you the way to escape without seeming to refuse. Your consent was not of my extorting, and you have no right to represent it as my fault.”

“Ethert, Ethert! Oh, what *have* I done that you should speak to me like this? the first unkind word you ever gave me, the unkindest I had ever heard till that day! Oh, what has changed you so? Listen to me, Ethert; surely I have not deserved this? Oh, what have I done, to bring on myself all that

I have had to bear? My mother's words stung like blows, or worse; and then...then I came to you, and you made me almost content, almost happy to obey. I thought you wished—well, if I must not say that, I thought you agreed with Mamma that it must be—was to be. Do tell me...if I have deserved all this...what have I done? Oh, what shall I do—what can I say? Ethert, I did not mean—God knows I did not mean to do wrong! I tried to do what Mamma told me, what you seemed to wish; and I thought it must be right, because it was so hard.”

Her tears, the piteous appeal of her words, touched and softened Ethert's heart at once. He could see only the cousin he had petted so long, had taught to trust so thoroughly in his kindness; forgot for the moment the bride he had almost learned to hate in the last few bitter days.

“Indeed,” he said penitently, “I did not mean to blame you, Ivy; only, don't blame *me*, don't make me answerable if you repent your sacrifice already. No, it was not your fault; you were only too ready to trust, to

yield your own wishes, your own feelings. It was not your fault; I only hope it was not mine. Now don't cry so, *ma petite*," resting his hand on her shoulder as he had been wont to do in soothing her childish troubles. "God does know, and I know, Ivy, you could never mean to be other than kind and dutiful. Only I feel it is so hard on you, I cannot bear to be told that your consent was my doing; I have enough to answer for myself."

The words were cold enough; but the altered tone, the caress, slight as it was, and the pet name, disused ever since the moment when at the lawyer's first hint he had caught the alarm now too fatally verified, were all so ultimately interwoven with the pleasantest, dearest associations of Ivy's childhood, so recalled her habitual expectation of comfort and sympathy from Ethert, that they calmed and soothed her strangely; the more that there was so much of sheer bewilderment in her distress. To be harshly treated, to be scolded by the protector and playmate of her childish holidays, the friend and companion of her girlhood, the one who

had never seemed impatient with weaknesses that had tried the patience of her father and brother—was so novel, incredible an experience that Ivy could less easily believe in its reality than fancy that she had misunderstood the words, plain and harsh as they had been, that she had heard.

“Ethert, I don’t understand,” she said piteously, as soon as she could command her voice. “I have nothing to repent, unless you repent it; and you know I did not mean to complain, to call you unkind because you . . . I could not, you know, *now*. I could not think to myself, much less say to you, that I am sorry . . . sorry to be—and when you speak and look as you used to do such a very few weeks ago, do you fancy I am not content? Only, Ethert, do say one word—you never scolded me before, do comfort me a little now. You cannot think how terribly you hurt and frightened me—I know—you never would, you never meant it—only I am so easily frightened, and it is all so strange. Do say that you don’t repent; say at any rate you forgive me if I ought to have done differently. But

indeed I don't see, now, what I have done or said amiss."

The admixture of true maidenly instinct with almost infantine simplicity, the relapse from the woman into the child of one who was as yet more child than woman, natural as it was, took Ethert wholly by surprise. He felt much more keenly than he had yet done the injury inflicted on her by the marriage accepted for her sake, and felt too for the time that any wrong he had suffered was far less than hers. If Ivy had remained no more than the cousin she was three months before, every new revelation of her character and feeling under the bitter trial of present circumstances would have more and more endeared her to him; especially since, while loving her as a child, he had thought her somewhat too much the child for her actual years. But, forced at every other word to remember that she was no longer the favourite he had petted as a child-sister, but the wife whom he had *not* chosen, he saw not so much the development of her former self as the contrast with his ideal, and was

hardened against her charms by a feeling of constancy to the image of his dream.

To the wife he could no longer offer what she would have been so well content to retain, the tenderness that had been almost fraternal; while as a wife she had no place in his affection, and he would not pretend what he did not feel, and had refused to promise. Yet the claim he would not acknowledge necessarily chafed him, irritated him perhaps into a practical denial of pretensions which the name alone seemed to assert. He would not speak another unkind word, he was only too wishful to unsay all that had grieved her; yet he could hardly help wounding and stinging her afresh, while the phrases and looks of caressing tenderness that would have soothed and almost satisfied her, that till now her tears had never failed to call forth, seemed intentionally withheld.

“I don’t repent,” he said with a forced smile, “what I did so deliberately not twenty-four hours ago. And, Ivy, you have done nothing to be forgiven, nothing that was not kindly, trustful, thoughtful for others rather

than yourself. I did not mean to vex you ; certainly not to scold. I could not let you make me answerable for your choice. I did not press you—did I, Ivy ?”

A faint shadow of a smile on the pale lips answered the question, as both remembered how very distinctly anything like pressure, even like the form of courtship or entreaty, had been avoided.

“And if I had, I could not ask or hope for your forgiveness. No, you have done nothing amiss ; your troubles have been utterly undeserved. If I did frighten or hurt you, I am very sorry ; it is not easy always to help it now. Don’t misunderstand me if you can possibly avoid it ; there is so much you cannot understand and I must not explain. I know I must seem unkind, perhaps unfeeling ; there is nothing natural or comfortable about the whole business, and perhaps no one has acted well except yourself. Never doubt,” he went on, feeling distinctly his utter failure to satisfy or set her mind at rest, and striving to reinforce the conscious weakness of his words by multiplying phrases of consolation, each of which rather

deepened the painful impression made by that which was wanting in all, "never doubt that I feel and remember how hard this has been for you, how great your sacrifice has been. It is because I feel *that* that I could not bear to be made answerable for it. It is enough to have been the instrument, to bear my part And no doubt, cousin, you did think what I wished, what I thought best. I only hope we judged well for you, since we could not, would not, let you have the means of judging for yourself."

She understood that he wished, was trying to soothe and content her, and reproached herself that she felt still so dissatisfied, so little sure that what he called a sacrifice had not been at least a blunder. Her silence, the quivering lip, the tears which in her own despite still fell one by one from her downcast eyes, showed but too clearly how completely his efforts to console her had failed; and now that words were well nigh exhausted he felt the constraint, the strangeness, of his own manner and hers, the unwonted physical as well as moral distance between them.

As they turned at the end of the terrace, by an impulse almost as much of habit as of kindness, or even of pity, he took her little hand in his and drew it within his arm. Once more a token of kindness, the slightest perhaps that the mere courtesy of compassion could have given, touched Ivy's sorely troubled heart and reversed the current of her feeling. Once more this effect was due to the memories that associated Ethert's look, touch, and voice with all she had known of consoling, careful, considerate tenderness. In Ethert's arms she had been carried mile after mile in days so early that they had left behind only one or two vivid remembrances—pictures isolated by utter forgetfulness of the years that had intervened and followed, yet so burnt in upon the mind in infancy that they can never fade, never be effaced by the more exciting but less impressive recollections of riper age. Mother or nurse had never contented the baby girl when Ethert was in sight. To Ethert's fingers the child had clung so habitually that almost ere she could speak plainly she manifested a sense of property therein ;

and even Charlie in her presence might not usurp "*my* hand." By that hand she had been led till such guidance hardly suited the dignity of her twelfth year; on that arm she had leaned in all the walks, near or distant, that had been the holiday pleasures of her girlhood, claiming its support so naturally, so constantly that neither ever thought of suggesting fatigue or rough ground as an excuse. Not to have claimed or received it would have seemed to mark conscious formality, if not coolness.

Only within the last few weeks would either willingly have foregone the habit that drew them so close. Perhaps Ivy had not quite liked to see Meta take the same place, when on steep fells or dry water-courses Ethert's assistance was really useful. And now, the silent invitation where she had been wont to need none, the look that almost seemed to plead for a liberty so lately assumed of course, not only re-assured her doubts, but awakened a self-reproach or self-questioning entirely undeserved. When Ethert thus broke through the unseen, indefinite barrier between them, Ivy wondered

whether that barrier might not have been her own creation, whether the constraint of which she was painfully conscious had not begun on her own side. So absolute had been till very recently the ease between them that, as she hardly knew which had been wont to offer, so she was hardly sure which had first withdrawn the little signs of domestic affection and confidence. Her maiden instinct had been true and keen; she had obeyed it perforce in foregoing at once all that Ethert had silently withheld, shrinking instantly into a reserve more complete than his own. But her obedience had been so unconscious, unquestioning that she could not retrace the process which had not been one of reasoning, but of feeling. She almost accused herself of the coldness that had chilled their intercourse; asked herself why, on what provocation, she had become so distant towards one who certainly never had and never would have repelled her.

There had been nothing tangible, nothing she could repeat to herself to prove the unkindness, the estrangement she had so quickly taken for granted. The kiss forgotten at parting, when,

as she now knew, his mind had been painfully pre-occupied—the caressing words to which her ear was used, omitted while he knew not whether they would be addressed to a sister or a future wife, naturally withheld from one who might yet have rejected his offered hand—these were the utmost evidences on which she had convicted of unkindness and punished by ungrateful coldness a friend whose tenderness and consideration had never failed her during seventeen happy years. And now, as a wife, was it not her part to ask pardon if she had unwittingly offended, to confess and try to atone for the constraint that must have pained him?

The instinctive delicacy and dignity of the maiden bride were strong enough to control the utterance of such a feeling even when quickened by her sense of conjugal duty: she simply *could* not offer a renewal of the loving frankness which, despite all her sweet inward sophistry, she *felt* that Ethert had voluntarily interrupted; but she could meet with ready warmth of affection, with utter absence of resentment, his first advance. Her slender

fingers closed as of old in a soft lingering pressure on the arm they held, and their clasp spoke to Ethert's heart her unconscious forgiveness of all he had made her suffer, her glad acceptance of all that he was willing to restore.

At that moment Ethert was thankful for the publicity of the scene, for the possible presence of unseen eyes, that restrained his natural impulse to cast away constraint and precaution, to give and woo the kiss that would have dried Ivy's tears, soothed the aching of her heart, and the stings that tortured his own, and restored the pleasant ease and intimacy of their cousinhood. And in so far he did well and unselfishly from his own point of view. His reserve might be harsh in seeming; indulgence to the impulses of a tenderness which was not love would have been selfish in essence. The easiest, pleasantest course the one that masculine heartlessness would certainly have taken, would have been to revert easily to their former freedom, careless of its effect on Ivy's feeling, reckless of the aspect it might give, in her eyes especially, to their present relation.

With all that was false in his views, all that was dangerously unsound in his morality, all that was weak, fretful, foolish in his conduct, Ethert was loyal in spirit. His passions and wishes might blind his judgment, but could not pervert his conscience. He misunderstood Ivy's sentiment, misconceived her interests; but it was on his estimate of these that he acted. Within certain bounds he was earnestly bent to do his duty by her, so long as what was best for her did not demand the one effort he held impossible, the one humiliation he could not endure. Two things only he would not do for her. He might seem to enjoy her fortune; but while the world held it to be hers he would not touch it. He had renounced every other hope, renounced alike love and the personal liberty some men surrender reluctantly even as the price of love itself, in order to give her the legal security and social protection he could confer only by giving her his hand; but he was most unwilling to give more—or, as he would truthfully have described the feeling of which he was most clearly conscious, unwilling to take anything in return.

For no one else could he have sacrificed so much ; indeed, he could hardly have carried the sacrifice so far, at such cost to his sensitive feelings and punctilious pride, had not his affection for Ivy been much warmer and more real than he was aware. Incomparably fonder and softer than his regard for his mother—more natural and less fanciful, more of the heart and less of the imagination than his dream-love for Meta—that affection for his youthful cousin was probably on the whole the deepest and strongest, the truest and tenderest he had ever known.

In the nature of a poet and romanticist, whose conscious loves had ever a strong element of fantasy, an affection of slow, insensible, unconscious growth, of domestic habit, took deep root and clung with extreme tenacity. For his mother Ethert would have given life at need as a matter of duty too plain to admit of liking or disliking ; for Meta he would have encountered death with chivalrous enthusiasm, crossed by a lurking doubt—inseparable from the latent critical judgment necessary to a true poet—that he was playing the fool ; exaggerating a passion,

if not acting a part. For Ivy he had done far more than risk life or limb; had accepted a situation from which he would gladly have been released by death—but accepted it sullenly, grudgingly, under a keen sense of compulsion and injustice.

Yet after all the essence of the compulsion, the really coercive force, was simply a regard for Ivy stronger than his care for all that he surrendered to save her. He could bear to resign Meta, as men endure to lose a limb; he could submit, as men submit to toothache or cancer, to be accused of a mercenary marriage; he could bear, as men bear a sentence of lifelong penal servitude, the prospect of ridicule and contempt, of future trouble and scandal, of all the miseries which his vivid fancy and sensitive temper discerned in a loveless marriage and an unhappy home—he simply *could not* bear to see Ivy suffering, shamed, degraded in the world's eyes and her own, and still less to assist in and profit by her ruin.

But the very depth of his half-conscious attachment—his reverence and regard for her who impersonated to his eyes the ideal per-

fection of maiden innocence—rendered simple natural kindness in the actual situation impossible to him. He did not see his way; and could not, dared not tamper with the treasury of virginal affections, the sanctuary of a young girl's inner nature, whereof the key was given into his hand. Rarely indeed has such an opportunity been afforded to a professed student of the mysteries of maiden feeling; for Ethert well knew that all the inmost secrets of Ivy's spirit were as fully at his command as if the veil had been rent by the passionate impulses of bridal tenderness. The less she loved, the more conscious of the hollowness of her vows, the more absolute and complete would be her self-surrender; and Ethert held a clue that few wedded lovers can have, in his intimate knowledge of his bride's mental history from her very cradle.

But it would have been sacrilege to profane with irreverent look, unloving touch, the *penetralia* of the shrine. He would not even press or draw her on to betray what it much concerned him to know—the actual state of her feelings towards himself; the net result of the

conflicting emotions that must agitate her; the struggle between the loathing anticipations of an unwilling marriage, and fond recollections of an affection close and confidential as that of a favourite sister. The very frankness and eagerness of that life-long affection showed that Ivy had never dreamed of that which men and women commonly mean when they speak of love; did she dream of it even now? He thought not; her efforts to conceal aversion and unhappiness were crossed by no shadow of fear or shame, such as a bride must feel who, dreaming of love, knows herself neither loved nor loving—yet wedded. That without dreaming of it she could be close to its verge—that verge where girlish affection and maiden love approach so nearly that the first whispers of a lover's passion can change the one into the other—that already any demonstration of fondness on his side would give to her tenderness as much of passion as her nature allowed or his would have desired—this truth the poet who had sketched so many phases of maiden love—who had traced it from its first unconscious flutterings to the very portals of the bridal chamber, half-conscious

even there—missed as completely as any disciple of Swinburne or Walt Whitman; as completely, but very narrowly, and for far other reasons.

Convinced that a girl's first love is often, perhaps usually, untinged by passion, and is rarely indeed conscious of such a tinge, he was the more confident that it is always deeply and consciously coloured by romance; and of romance there had been no trace in Ivy's open, innocent, trustful devotion. Of the dominating, controlling influence he had wielded over her from infancy—which had given form to her every idea, to her whole nature, even to her love for him—which would have enabled him at will to make that love the reflex image, the feminine counterpart of his own—he had never been fully aware, and was now wholly forgetful.

CHAPTER II.

EVASION.

NEVER had Ethert been so thankful for a trifling accident as for that summons on some matter of household business which interrupted their *tête-à-tête* at this most difficult and critical moment. For the rest of that day, he contrived with no little difficulty not to be alone with his bride. Her mother's presence during the evening made it possible, if not easy, to maintain a perfectly neutral attitude, to avoid every word that could either be false to his own thought or incompatible with the nominal situation, that could either wound or deceive his cousin. But the "good night" again brought back the difficulty, the harassing sense of constraint, and made him dread the morning greeting.

Ivy, doubtful what might be his mood, took care to spare them both the enhanced awkwardness and pain that the presence of a witness to their parting would have involved; and with equal consideration contrived to meet him and afford the opportunity of a hasty "good morning" before they entered the breakfast room together. There he found letters, whereof one afforded so obvious and satisfactory a means of escape from a situation which must hourly become more perplexing and painful that he could hardly help starting as he realized its purport.

"I am very sorry," wrote Lestrangle, "that Everett's communication of this morning was not made yesterday before you left. It might have spared trouble, and would certainly have saved time. The Editorship of the *Australian* has been offered to him, and, subject to my consent, he had accepted it before he came to me. He must leave at once, which of course he had no right to do; but I could not call upon him to fulfil his engagement with me at such a sacrifice. I have not been satisfied with the working of our arrangement as regarded the

Colonial department, and I shall not attempt again to place the whole in a single hand. Our Literary Editor will take charge of our American Colonies, as he has done from the first of the United States; and I must make other changes in detail, which I need not and cannot fully explain in writing. Can you forego your holiday and return at once? If so, I can give you a new and much more satisfactory position, one that will be in fact a Parliamentary Editorship. But you must answer at once by telegraph and return this evening or to-morrow; or, if this be out of the question, you had better resign immediately and entirely. Of course I don't want you to do the latter, unless circumstances are likely to render it very soon convenient. It is reported this morning that the seat for Stapleton, perhaps something more, must speedily be vacant."

As he laid down the letter Ethert caught Ivy's eyes fixed on his face with an anxious look, in wistful if unintentional enquiry. She saw that something had occurred, that some news he had received had greatly interested him. Six months ago she would have questioned

him frankly, expecting his confidence, perfectly sure that if not given it would be kindly withheld. The wife felt that what concerned him must concern her, that she should be able at least to offer sympathy if she did not presume to counsel; but felt at the same time that she could put no question, ask no confidence that was not volunteered. The look disturbed him not a little. His impulse had been, as before, to speak, not to Ivy, but to her mother, to leave to the latter the duty of making a communication that could hardly be agreeable. He now knew that his motive would be apparent to Ivy, and would pain if not offend her. He could not make up his mind so to vex or disappoint her; still less could he resolve to speak in the first place to herself. In this perplexity he remained silent until both the ladies had left the room, Ivy lingering for a moment and turning upon him as she reluctantly departed a glance which was appealing, and which he fancied reproachful. He could take counsel for the moment only with his cigar, and withdrew for that purpose to a part of the gardens in which he thought he was hardly likely to be disturbed. Here

however he presently encountered Mr. Orme, who had paid an early and prolonged visit to his patient.

“There is nothing,” said the latter, in answer to Ethert’s formal enquiry, “to exhaust such vital powers as remain ; and therefore he may linger for several days. There seems no possibility that the lost consciousness, even the power of recognizing those about him, should return.”

“Then,” said Ethert enquiringly, “I am useless here? My cousin cannot leave him at present, of course, and I have received a letter which makes it very desirable that I should return to London immediately. If I understand you rightly, there is nothing to prevent it?”

“Of that,” replied the other gravely, “you must of course be the judge. I can only tell you that Sir Charles will not be aware of your absence.”

Ethert paused and pondered for a few minutes. There had been in the doctor’s tone something that in his ears sounded like surprise or reproof. He was conscious of no unkindness, no defect of sympathy towards Ivy, and yet half afraid

that his absence might make on others an impression which, if she perceived it, would be most painful to her.

“Have you seen my aunt yet?” he enquired at last. “Mr. Orme, I want to speak to her, and without making...my cousin aware of it. Can you see her alone and tell her so?”

The doctor quietly assented; and after a somewhat long interval Lady Glynne contrived to meet her nephew in the manner he had indicated.

“When I left London,” said Ethert, after a few words of course had passed, “I had naturally made arrangements for an absence of three or four weeks. Unfortunately I had absolutely promised to return at the end of that time, not anticipating what has actually happened; fancying that, if it were necessary to take a leave at all, that leave would be wanted immediately, and not, as now seems probable, at some uncertain and distant date. Now, this morning, I am asked if possible to return, owing to changes that have taken place in the office and which will materially improve my own position there. In short, I must return or

resign, and to resign I should be most reluctant."

"But, Ethert, why . . . Surely you will give up that . . . now?"

"I have no such intention," Ethert replied coolly: "certainly not at present."

His aunt was almost angry, and not unnaturally. It might be decorous to affect, it was absurd to act upon, any doubt, any reluctance to anticipate his proximate inheritance.

"These are mere words, Ethert," she answered. "You know how very soon you must be the owner of Glynnhurst."

"Glynnhurst, while Ivy lives, is, as you know, hers, and not mine."

"Ethert!"

"Aunt Caroline, what you have told Ivy, under what impression she consented to a marriage whose haste left her property at my disposal, I do not and scarcely wish to know. But as she does not, cannot know the legal flaw in her title, I will never give her the power, the excuse to think or say—what the world will,—that I married her for money."

“You know her too well, Ethert,” the mother answered indignantly, “to believe that she would so insult you either by word or thought!”

“Put it as you please. As she cannot guess the motives that really governed us, even an angel—and in unwillingness, incapacity to think evil, an angel could hardly be purer than she—must come to suspect.... But we need not discuss that point. It is well, as I think you yourself feel, for her sake and mine, that I should leave her to you for the present. I want you to tell her, to satisfy her that I must go, and not to let her feel that my going means neglect or unkindness to her.”

“Ethert, she will believe much more readily what you tell her yourself.”

“Aunt, you may, I cannot, prevent Ivy’s saying—what you see;—that the... the husband of the heiress of Glynnehurst could and might naturally give up his profession. She must not put that question to me. I do not know what her impressions may be: you who know exactly what she has been told, what she believes, may

be able to meet or to turn such questions as she may naturally ask ; I cannot."

"But, Ethert, can you not see that to throw such a communication on me is in itself to wound her more than by anything you might say? No one but yourself can possibly reconcile her to your leaving her now."

"Let her see that her mother thinks it right and natural ; let the future take care of itself. Of course I shall return the moment that occasion comes ; either you or Orme will summon me at once."

"And then, Ethert, you cannot of course leave her again. And you must not now suggest to Ivy an indefinite, uncertain delay. You will claim her when . . . when she is released from her duty here?"

"It is not for me to judge of that: that is a question for her decision, and hers alone. The story is strange enough—yes, I know what you would say ; we must give no occasion for further comment or conjecture at present—but my absence just now would be less awkward for her than my presence."

Lady Glynne sighed. "Perhaps so ; but you

will let her understand that is only till she is released?"

"I suppose," replied Ethert reluctantly, "I must—well, I will claim her when you tell me that she would really wish it. But remember, she is to do exactly as she pleases; I neither expect nor desire any further sacrifice or concession on her part. And as to taking her from home immediately afterwards—I could not propose such a thing, if you can. I could not tell her that I intend to claim a bride in her first mourning. But I leave you to explain things as you think fit. Her mother, I suppose, can best deal with all that must and all that must not be said; can best spare Ivy's feelings while making sure that she understands all she need understand. You know, and must make her feel your conviction that I am not unkind or neglectful, that I feel for her. You must take care that she does not misconceive or take amiss what is meant as best for both."

Lady Glynne again felt more than she chose to understand in his language—felt it unsafe further to press or question him. "Perhaps it

is as well," she said reluctantly. "But, Ethert, Ivy felt very deeply yesterday your proposal to leave her; and it will depend on yourself, on your manner, your tone to her, more than on your actual explanation, how she will feel it now."

Both parties had been naturally, and not altogether unreasonably, irritated by this discussion. Each was sure that the other had been insincere; each thought that the other should have understood and recognized what was not and hardly could be said. She distrusted his intention: he perceived and resented her distrust, and she perhaps resented his resentment. On his part, holding that his absence was appropriate, he refused to remember how differently it must appear when suggested by himself, and not, as it might in another case have been, by his bride's mother on her behalf. Indeed, Lady Glynne herself could not but reflect, that if stated to any utter stranger, Ethert's wish would have seemed reasonable, and her own task comparatively easy. As it was, she greatly distrusted her ability to reconcile Ivy's mind to that which the latter would

feel less as a slight to the bride than an unkindness to the cousin. She succeeded but ill in the duty forced upon her; succeeded only in impressing upon Ivy's mind the idea that the secret which had cost them all so dear, which had caused her so much inexplicable pain and perplexity, involved at every step new and increasingly harassing constraint and concealment.

It was in a state of excitement and almost irritation very unwonted with one so gentle and submissive, that she awaited Ethert's coming. Her mother had wished her spontaneously to seek him, if not to ask the explanation he was ready to give; but with this suggestion Ivy for once refused to comply, hardly understanding the motive of her own refusal. And Ethert felt that it was beyond question his part to seek her out, to show every mark of deference and consideration that might soothe or reconcile her. She rose hastily as he entered the drawing-room, and her eyes almost asked the question from which instinct restrained her tongue.

"Ivy," he said, in a tone that of itself conveyed not a little of comfort and confidence to

her troubled spirit, "you chose the other day our favourite walk under the beeches for a painful, at any rate a trying, conversation. I am afraid what I have to say cannot be wholly pleasant to you anywhere. I should like to speak where you will least be able to think that I mean anything unkind to my cousin; will you get your hat and cloak and come out with me?"

Watching her face as he spoke, he saw how much the sentiment of the proposal had pleased her, how instantly it had reached a sensitive somewhat over-fanciful heart. She did not answer in words, but the look turned to his face, as she moved quickly and lightly from the room to comply with his request, assured him that so far he had begun well the awkward task he had undertaken. Waiting for her at the foot of the stairs, he noticed with no little pleasure that once more, by habit doubtless rather than by conscious intention, she took his arm as she had been wont to do; at least she had forgotten the constraint that had of late rendered her conscious of such a trifle.

"I know," he said when the door had closed

behind them, "I know it seems to you somewhat unkind, or at least unnecessary, that I should leave you, even for a few days, just now. Can you not believe me, Ivy, if I tell you that I mean no unkindness; that I think, though you may not now, you would soon begin to feel my presence inconvenient? I think it has never been so yet; I have flattered myself at least that it has been a pleasure to you, as your society has been the deepest, best of all enjoyments to me; and I should not like it even for a few days to be otherwise."

"Ethert, how can you think such a thing, because we are in sorrow, in trouble? Do you not know that I have always looked to you for sympathy, for comfort? It did seem very unkind, very unlike you, and I could not help feeling it as I should not have done before. It is only now that I could have believed that you meant to be unkind to me, and I know when you say it is not so you mean it. Only I can hardly believe you think I would rather be without you."

"I don't think you are aware of it, Ivy. I think you would presently, and—well, ask your

mother whether . . . whether any other girl would not be likely to feel so."

She coloured a little, as if she had understood him better than he expected; her first words however showed that this was not the case.

"That is just what Mamma said. I cannot understand, but when you both say it I suppose, I am sure, you are right. I am sorry you think it best, that it should be best, Ethert; but now . . . now I am content. It is not"—and her eyes earnestly looking up into his own repeated and enforced the question—"it is not that you want to get rid of me, even for a little while? Only you are wanted in London, and you think—you cannot think that I do not want you—that you had better leave me to Mamma, or rather leave Mamma to me?"

It was hard to meet and answer that look frankly enough to sustain the impression his words were meant to convey.

"It is that, Ivy, and nothing else. And I am very much wanted in London. I had a letter from Lestrangle this morning almost telling

me that I must either go back now or resign altogether."

"And why should you not, Ethert? Your work has not been, I believe, very interesting; not as if you could write yourself, take part in the subjects you care for. Mamma called it drudgery, and Papa wondered you would stoop to it. And—" she hesitated, "you know, surely you know, you will be wanted here by-and-bye. Even if Papa were better I am afraid he could never attend to things again."

"I know I shall be wanted presently," he answered, deliberately misconceiving her, "and then of course I shall return at once."

She did not perceive the evasion, but she did realize the inconsistency.

"But, Ethert, if you have to return so soon, surely you can be of little use; it can hardly be worth your while or others' that you should go back there for so short a time."

"We cannot discuss, we cannot settle anything for the future now, Ivy; not even how and where I shall be most useful hereafter. But of the drudgery you speak of, I think, there will be an

end. There are changes in the office, and Lestrangle offers me a new position, and one that will give me more useful and more interesting work."

"I am glad of that," she answered with ready sympathy. "Ethert—forgive me if I have been unjust, hasty in thinking you could be unkind to me. But—you know there has been so much lately I could not understand."

"Very much, Ivy, and I am very sorry for it. No, you have nothing for which to ask forgiveness. If you had not been very good, very patient with me you must have taken offence, naturally, if not justly, at much that I could not and cannot explain. And you will forgive me now—forgive my going, and believe that, even if you think me mistaken, I mean to do what is kindest by you?"

The deeper meaning of which he was half-conscious gave a graver tone than he intended to a sentence meant to refer only to the immediate subject of their conversation. The gravity conveyed to Ivy's mind only the thought that her misconception of his feeling had pained Ethert more than she was aware, that he had

expected and rightfully expected a trust that would not have been shaken by evidences of coldness or neglect so slight as those on which she had judged him; and the penitence which was the natural fruit of her affectionate habitual confidence found expression so warm and earnest as to convey the keenest reproach to him, conscious how ill-deserved that trust had lately been.

“Ethert, I have hurt you; and I don’t wonder, when you have just done so much for me, have been so troubled, and I have thought only of the little things that seemed—that I allowed to vex me now, forgetting what you have been to me all my life long. Now, do forgive me, and say you forgive me; I will not be so quick to think you unkind again.”

She looked up eagerly, almost fondly, as she spoke; very sure of the forgiveness for which she asked, and equally sure, as Ethert instantly felt, how it would, must be expressed. To disappoint that natural, confident expectation would have been to undo all he had accomplished, to revive all the doubts, re-awaken all the distress he had with so much

difficulty allayed. Very unwillingly—because Ethert could never without extreme reluctance depart from a course he had once marked out for himself, but with a kind of unwillingness so distinctly, exclusively intellectual that she neither saw nor felt it—he stooped and pressed upon her forehead such a kiss as would have sealed a similar reconciliation months before, if till now a quarrel or misunderstanding between them had been possible.

CHAPTER III.

RESPITE.

“POLITENESS forbids me to condole, sincerity will not let me congratulate you, Glynne.” Such was Lestrangle’s greeting when, a few hours after the last conversation with his bride, Ethert entered the Editorial room. “But I do heartily wish you happy.”

“What do you mean—or rather how came you to know?” enquired Ethert sharply, taken completely by surprise.

“I don’t generally read the column of calamities,” his chief replied, more deeply and reasonably amazed; “but if I had not caught a familiar name, do you suppose I should not have been told of it ere now?”

“Do you mean that it is in the papers?—that is too bad!”

Ethert checked himself so suddenly that Lestrangle, while more and more astonished, had yet the tact to let the last words pass as if unheard. In the meantime, conscious at once of his own imprudence, Glynne had taken up his usual work, had opened and noted some half dozen letters before, having thus gained a few moments for reflection, he spoke again.

“I was taken by surprise, as you must understand. To no one else shall I say a word, good or bad; but to you after what you have seen, I had better say just this—my...my cousin is one whose hand any man might be proud and happy to win for herself alone.”

As his face was averted, Lestrangle did not instantly repress the very slight but very sarcastic smile that curled his thin lips. He was a man to appreciate exactly the feeling that had prompted the last sentence, to understand how much bitterness and dislike, if not to the lady yet certainly to the marriage, that formal, earnest commendation implied. Ethert had simply intended to render justice to his

bride; but to Lestrangle's perception, naturally prompt, sharpened by experience, and in this case quickened by the consciousness that Ethert had spoken exactly as he himself would have done, the very idea of such a tribute proved that the speaker could not and did not expect his friends to take the happiness of his marriage for granted. Ethert of course had no idea how much he had betrayed to the keen watchful eyes of his chief.

"Well, then," said Lestrangle, some half-hour later, "I suppose it is hardly worth while to explain to you how I had proposed in future to avail myself of your services? I pay you no empty compliment when I say I shall be sorry to lose them."

"I am sorry," replied Ethert, "and a little surprised to learn that you intend to dismiss me."

Lestrangle fortunately could not whistle, or some such sound would have expressed the consummation of his utter astonishment. Then, he thought, the incident in his friend's life which had taken him and all besides so utterly by surprise was yet stranger than he had

supposed. Not only were its motives, the cause of its suddenness and its secrecy, wholly unaccountable, but it did not mean, even for the future, what had seemed its most obvious consequence. The unknown story was yet more perplexing, if not more romantic, than it had first appeared.

“Coupling the advertisement with a paragraph in this morning’s *Courier*,” he observed, after a full minute’s silence, “I had assumed that a very few weeks at most would place you in a position quite incompatible with that I was about to propose to you. The owner of Glynnehurst and probable Member for Stapleton would hardly care for an assistant’s post even on a more prosperous paper.”

“Possibly ; but I am neither, nor, so far as I know, likely to be.”

“Indeed ! Then the writer of this paragraph deserves a pretty sharp reprimand. There is nothing more damaging to a paper’s credit than to publish unfounded pieces of personal gossip respecting public men. But I did think that Sir Charles Glynne’s illness was as serious as reported. He did not appear in Parliament

last Session, and —— told us he would not stand again.”

Ethert did not reply, and Lestrangle took up a little volume that lay under his hand ; a Parliamentary Companion interleaved with careful notes on the character of the constituencies, and remarks in cipher respecting the character, health, and circumstances of the members.

“Our electioneering information comes from headquarters, and has never yet been wrong,” he said. “Will you tell me how far this report of the present state of the Member for Stapleton is exaggerated?”

Ethert glanced hastily over the paragraph.

“It could hardly be exaggerated,” he said : “and on that account I fear I shall have to leave you again before long, and at very short notice. Of course I must not merely attend but arrange for the last ceremony.”

“The paragraph reports,” said Lestrangle, “that Sir Charles Glynne is at least incapacitated from even taking part in the councils of his political friends.”

“It is true,” replied Ethert, quietly.

“I am sorry to hear it, sorry that you antici-

pate such a necessity, and so soon," replied Lestrangle, in the cold formal tone he always used when called upon to express the decorous regret which men are expected to affect for losses not likely on the whole to impair the happiness of their friends. "But if it be so, Glynne, I don't understand the answer you have just given me. But, pardon me for saying it, there is something of greater and more instant moment that must demand your attention. Have arrangements been made to secure the seat? The writ must issue, you know, immediately, if the House be sitting, and it is of the more consequence that a General Election will follow within a few months or weeks."

"Nothing has been said to me on the subject."

"Then," inferred his chief, quickly, "nothing has been done. Of course it would be indecent to take any open action while the present Member lives and retains his seat; but when once a speedy vacancy is expected all possible steps are taken on both sides in anticipation of the writ. Indeed, Glynne, you cannot afford to waste time. You are not, I

fancy, experienced in elections; I assure you that even in a place like Stapleton the enemy will be on the *qui vive*, ready to snap at the smallest chance that slackness on your part may afford. Really, pardon my interference, but this is a very serious matter; you must not lose the seat to your party."

At this moment the office boy brought in a telegram addressed to Mr. Glynn, announcing that the messenger awaited a prepaid reply:—

"John Verner, Stapleton.

"To Ethert Glynn, Esq., *Courier* Office, London.

"Much disappointed not to find you at Glynnhurst this afternoon. Pray come down at once; but telegraph whether you will stand yourself, or whom you would recommend."

"Well," said Lestranger, when Ethert handed him the paper, "you see there is no time to lose."

For all answer Ethert laid before him his brief reply:—

“I cannot act for Sir Charles Glynne without the authority he cannot give. I have no title and no wish to interfere either with the electors of Stapleton or with my uncle’s tenants.”

There was something in his friend’s manner and in the expression of his countenance that compelled Lestrangle to repress, though with difficulty, the intense vexation he felt. He would heartily have liked to see Glynne himself in Parliament; but the idea that so grave a question as the selection of a successor should be left to chance, that the seat might possibly be lost through Ethert’s mere eccentric humour—for Lestrangle felt sure that no political puritanism or Quixotry dictated his abstinence—was intolerably provoking. The veteran politician could no more understand such trifling with a political struggle than a general could comprehend, except as sheer treason, the perversity or obstinacy that would risk the loss of a battle. With very obvious impatience he turned to the work before him, in which Glynne co-operated for some time as steadily

and with as much concentrated attention as if neither Stapleton nor Glynnehurst contained anything that concerned him. When their most pressing business was disposed of, Lestrangle at last reverted, speaking with some evident though repressed irritability, to Ethert's personal intentions.

"Am I seriously to understand," he said, "that you wish to retain your connection with the *Courier*?"

"Certainly," was the reply, "unless the Editor of the *Courier* thinks that he could better dispense with me."

"You must not trifle with me, Glynne. It would not suit me to have to make another change a few weeks hence. The duties of the post I propose to you are chiefly Parliamentary: I cannot myself attend the House, nor can I leave it solely to the care of our reporting or leader-writing staff. Some one must take charge, must learn each afternoon on the spot what the business is to be, must attend to any sudden diversion, must see those party managers and independent members with whom we are necessarily in communication,

and must remain here till the last moment to revise the Parliamentary leaders. The most critical of these he would do well to write himself. You see the work is very interesting and very important. Next to myself, and in some sense even more than myself, the holder of such a post will be to the political world the representative of the paper. I must not be forced to change him; and unless you are quite resolved, unless you see your way, you must not take the office. If you do you will feel bound in honour not to abandon it for your own caprice or convenience."

"Of course not," Ethert replied. "It would suit me thoroughly, if you think me as well suited to it."

"You are the man for the place," Lestrangle answered, "if you are in earnest. I wish to ask no questions; but naturally it seems almost impossible that you should seriously intend to retain it."

"I can give you no explanation," Ethert replied; "but, while my health and your approval last, I will not fail you."

The next day brought two letters, both of which Ethert opened with a nervous uncom-

fortable feeling such as the handwriting had never before excited.

“I am intensely, painfully startled, but in some sense not surprised. I will not annoy you by enquiry or conjecture, since the thing is, I suppose, done and cannot be helped. But I can conceive of no revelation that could have entitled Lady Glynne or Sir Charles to insist upon this marriage; nor can I believe that, if Ivy’s hand held securely the title-deeds and rent-roll of Glynnehurst, it would have been conceded to, much less pressed upon you. That it has been so pressed I can hardly doubt, since you certainly had no intention of this kind when you left us; and had you formed one in the meantime I cannot think that you would have kept me in ignorance. I still hope to avoid the necessity of coming to London. But you know I never think concealment or misrepresentation expedient in the family circle. I have grave cause to believe that before many months have passed you will have to decide on another home for Meta.”

Such was almost the whole of his mother's reply to the brief unexplanatory announcement of his intended marriage. Meta's letter was scarcely longer, was written with an evident and very unusual constraint, and dwelt chiefly and very earnestly on the illness, daily increasing, and the manifest weakness and suffering of her protectress. Of the news which Ethert himself had conveyed to her she spoke only in a few final lines.

"It was kind of you to tell me yourself. Of course I was astonished; it must have been very sudden. But you always liked"—two or three blots showed that Meta had hesitated, and decided at last on the formal—"Miss Glynne very much; and I do hope and pray you may be happy. I am more glad than you will be to think that Glynnehurst is to be yours, that you have not to live in London."

Ethert never felt his disappointment more keenly than at that moment. He knew Meta well enough to appreciate the tact that had inspired, the trouble that had perfected her terse congratulation. She could not tell him

directly what she felt he would most wish to hear—that she would never suspect him of a mercenary or selfish motive. She had, child as she was, found means of conveying the assurance with a discretion, a delicacy that Ivy herself could not have attained; and it was most unfortunate for the latter that Ethert should thus again be reminded how much, in expectation if not in the present, she had cost him. He bit his lip hard, as he read and re-read the few simple phrases, to keep the tears from his eyes, and failed after all.

His new employment interested him profoundly, occupied his mind, completely enlisted and excited his feelings in the political contest going on. Parliament had just met after an Autumn and Winter stormy with such passionate political agitation as England and Scotland had not witnessed for many a year. The people perhaps were not really stirred as they had been on occasions when much less effort had been made to move them; but those practically engaged in the party strife were roused to the uttermost when the leader of Opposition, the former Prime Minister, the

greatest orator of his generation, took the stump in the fashion of an American aspirant to power ; and harangued the crowded audiences that such a speaker can always command in language more extreme, entertained them with charges more virulent and extravagant, than the abler sort of British demagogues commonly employ. He had aroused the drooping spirits, the failing hopes of his own party ; he had bitterly angered those against whose leaders he had used invective, had preferred accusations which logically required, as Lestrangle had said, that either they or he should be for the future excluded from the society of gentlemen ; which, if sustained, were morally damning to them—if not, entailed on him a yet deeper and more indelible disgrace. It was expected that he would repeat and attempt to maintain them in Parliament ; the more so that many of his adherents had made direct pointed charges upon matters of fact which in former years must have been proved on the floor of the House of Commons, or visited with such Parliamentary reprobation as would have crushed the hardened offenders who uttered them.

Ethert, who was somewhat too sensitive for a politician in these democratic days, who would fain have forced the accusers to answer at the mouth of the pistol for assertions one or two of which he deemed obviously and impudently untrue, was soon absorbed in the contest, in the interest of debate or of its absence. Lestrangle, himself bitter and vehement in feeling and expression, but, as Cleveland had said, careful and moderate under the weight of responsibility, was somewhat surprised, and now and then a little embarrassed by the ardour of his colleague. It was probable, he thought, that Glynne's passionate indignation was not altogether attributable to political warmth; that he vented on the leaders of Opposition the angry feelings that might have been originally called forth by a painful personal position. He was pleased, however, to perceive how keenly his friend's political and parliamentary ambition was enkindled, how evidently he would have given a limb to bear his part with tongue and vote rather than with his pen in the struggle that so profoundly interested him.

The writ for Stapleton of course could not

issue while its nominal member lived, and lived in a condition which incapacitated him from taking the legal steps to vacate his seat; and Lestrangle hoped that, before the vacancy could occur, Glynne might be stimulated to a degree of eagerness that would overcome the scruple or crotchet which prevented his attempting to claim a seat almost as much a part of his inheritance as Glynnehurst itself.

Sir Charles Glynne, however, lingered on, "a still warm corpse and yet unburi-able," longer than any one had thought possible. Days were added to days, week followed week, and the spark of existence grew fainter, flickered, but did not expire. It was evident that Ivy might well have left Glynnehurst for a period long enough to satisfy all social usages, without exposing herself to the reproach of having deserted her father's last hours. To her alone no such thought occurred. Lady Glynne daily repented her reticence, hourly wished that she had found courage at the outset to press a proposal which, if urged by her, could hardly have been resisted.

Ethert, fully and clearly realizing the false-

hood of that formal observance by which he had profited—aware that Sir Charles was and would remain utterly insensible of his daughter's presence, that if conscious for an hour after the ceremony he would have vehemently insisted on her departure—could hardly help despising his own insincerity and his aunt's cowardice. He was glad of the insight which assured him that neither would ever be discerned by Ivý; that it would have shocked and pained her had she been urged to admit and act upon the truth—to recognize that to all human purpose her father had ceased to live, that her filial duty was paid, not to his living self, but to the senseless form, in direct disobedience to his last conscious wishes.

At the end of a fortnight Ethert wrote privately to Mr. Orme, feeling that the delay had already assumed the character of suspense rather than respite. The answer was: "It can hardly last forty-eight hours longer." It did last ten days. The separation, meant to be brief, prolonged from day to day in hourly expectation of the end, began to wear an awkward and almost injurious aspect. Lestrangle's knowledge

of the case perhaps prevented actual comment among his staff; but the conscious embarrassment he felt in presence of his colleagues, and of all with whom his duties brought him into contact, warned Ethert what must be the surprise and wonder of society. He could not blame Mr. Brand for the announcement of his marriage; the lawyer could not have foreseen how inconvenient its publication would actually become, and a long delay therein would by itself have excited curiosity when the date must at last have been given.

So unpleasant became the sense of incongruity, of a situation false in itself and sure to attract attention, that Ethert became almost impatient of that which had been at first a welcome reprieve; impatient even for the crisis of his fate, the day which must determine the whole course of his future, though unable as ever to make up his mind how he would act when the moment should arrive. Each morning his first waking thought was of the news which might await him, each business message made his heart beat with anxious anticipation. When at last on his late breakfast table he saw

side by side a telegraphic message from Mr. Orme, a letter sent by hand, with deep mourning edge, directed in his aunt's handwriting, it was with a sense almost exclusively of relief that he knew that the end had come at last.

“It is over, Ethert; and I cannot pretend to regret it, for his sake or my own; still less for yours or Ivy's. Of course you will come down, and at once? For her sake, let there be no further delay; come to her forthwith. Only her implicit faith, her submissive loyalty, made it possible for her to believe in the kindly intention of your absence. The fewness, the brevity, I fear the tone, of your letters have greatly distressed her. She asks me, not why you are cold or hard, but what her fault has been, how she has deserved your displeasure? That you intend to punish her she takes for granted; that you could do so without cause she cannot conceive.

“I have told her what I suppose is in some sense true, that the same motives which induced you to leave her to me make you avoid

all reference to your new relation. But your letters have been too evidently unlike what even your mutual affection as cousins and intimate companions might have made them, remind her too painfully of all that has pained her since the first suggestion of your marriage. It is well that she has so few former letters with which to contrast them. Ethert, if she do not prove as dutiful, as affectionate as if she had been won by love alone—all that you could desire, all that the most devoted and loving wife could be—I don't say 'it will not be her fault,' I say it will be your own doing; I might almost add, your own deliberate choice."

Like every intercession prompted by Lady Glynne's uneasy conscience or maternal solicitude, this letter was profoundly injudicious and entirely mischievous. It angered and embittered one who needed no admonition to remind him of his wife's blamelessness. It failed to affect his rooted belief in her intense aversion to their marriage. He was too just consciously to turn his irritation on Ivy, yet in his own despite

he could not but feel the less kindly towards the subject of so much annoyance, the guiltless instrument of so much pain and bitterness.

“This will never do! Ivy is in her right. She might be wiser not to complain; but—whose dog am I, that I should find fault, if she will not affect the conjugal loyalty she cannot feel? Poor child! It would be hard enough if we had loved each other; and as it is But my aunt must and shall mind her own business. To screen her name and secure Ivy’s patrimony, she chose that we should marry without love. She at least must accept the situation for which she is responsible.”

His brief reply to Lady Glynne, containing no word of reference to Ivy, administered with telling effect the rebuke of silence. It explained shortly the necessity which detained him in London till he had seen Mr. Brand, and till certain funeral preparations had been ordered. On other matters he wrote to instruct the agent, who observed with surprise that no phrase in a tolerably long letter betrayed the owner; that the tone was such as would rather have suited

the executor of the deceased, the guardian of the heiress. It was a harder task, and one that under other circumstances he would have deemed impossible, to compose a fitting letter to Ivy herself; a letter that should be kind without being false, cousinly and not conjugal; that should give comfort and avoid inflicting pain, without breaking the rule he had laid down for himself. He thought it possible, however, to offer what would seem natural consolation and kindness on an occasion like the present.

“ Dear Ivy,

“ I shall be with you, I hope, before you could answer this; but I could not bear to leave you for a day in doubt, if you could doubt, how completely my thoughts, my heart, are with you in a sorrow I know you feel so deeply. I wish I could hope that you will suffer less because there is in truth nothing new to grieve for; because, even before the loss that finally struck him down, your father had lived out his life. Even before that, he spoke to me as one whose part in this world was played out; and after-

wards his only care was to see your future assured. I never knew, never understood, Ivy, how much he cared for you, how large a place you filled in his thoughts, till he spoke to me on that subject.

“From me, to whom he was always kind and generous, he naturally expected that I would do what he judged best for his only daughter. But it will please you to know that it was not only of you he thought, that even while he hoped that his own son would be his successor, he was anxious for my future as well as yours ; and he believed that the step he pressed upon us was equally necessary to both. Your affectionate attention made the pleasure of his last days, comforted him for his loss ; and that his last conscious hours were content and happy was due to your unselfish submission.

“After all, Ivy, this is not the real blow, the true parting. That parting took place when he gave us his blessing as we stood beside his bed ; when his look followed you so anxiously to the altar, and his eyes rested on the fulfilment of his last earthly desire. So passing from the cares, the knowledge of this world, he was per-

fectly content, and that content he owed to you. Let that thought comfort you, dear cousin, both for your present loss and for the sacrifice you made at his command. A father's blessing cannot be wholly unavailing, and no child ever earned it better than you have done."

The letter was not strictly true, or even thoroughly sincere. But, as has been said before, Ethert refused to believe that the kindness he had enjoyed for so many years had been altogether selfish and interested—had been one long hypocrisy. He could not have borne so to give up the dearest recollections of the past, the associations that had made Glynnehurst almost more precious to him than his home. If he exaggerated the interest his uncle had expressed in himself, if he had suppressed entirely his belief that that interest was not wholly sincere, he was perhaps quite as truthful as any of us think it meet to be in presence of death, in face of the sacred sorrow of orphanhood. He honestly hoped that his letter would content Ivy. Had she read it as she read the hundred other notes of condolence

she had to peruse, it might have done so ; and as it was she could not account for her dissatisfaction, and reproached herself with exacting susceptibility. The letter was kind as well as compassionate, sympathising and comforting ; but it seemed the sympathy of a stranger, the kindness of a friend. And yet Ivy could find nothing amiss, unless it were the omission of those few scattered terms of domestic affection which Mr. Brand's hint had scared from Ethert's written and spoken language.

To show the letter to her mother was wholly incompatible with her sense of conjugal loyalty. She knew not why ; perhaps that, as she could not have revealed the words of endearment, she could still less bear to betray their absence. Otherwise she would fain have seen how the letter impressed an experienced, sympathising, but comparatively impartial reader.

Ethert was glad that on his arrival the pressure of business left him so little leisure to bestow on his relatives. That leisure, however, was less awkward than he had expected. His aunt seemed only anxious to postpone all possible occasion of discussion ; Ivy, though

depressed, sad, disheartened as he had never seen and was grieved to see her, evinced no shadow of anger or resentment; unless it were displeasure that prompted her so quietly to acquiesce in, if not even to second, the manœuvres by which he endeavoured to avoid a *tête-à-tête*. In others' presence it was possible to speak and act at least with natural kindness for his fatherless cousin: alone with her, his own sense of what was due to his bride—certainly no claim preferred directly or indirectly by herself—produced a constraint plainly evident to both. Ethert felt that he must seem unkind, and took for granted the discontent she never hinted. Silence, sadness, a timid shrinking from notice betrayed Ivy's consciousness of the painful situation.

Despite a private reputation by no means *sans reproche*, despite much recent neglect of his duties as landlord and representative, Sir Charles Glynne had remained popular both with his tenantry and his constituents, and a large number of both claimed the right to pay him the last tribute of respect. On this ground Ethert rested his earnest request that the ladies

would not attempt to attend the funeral. Lady Glynnne was not sorry to avail herself of a sufficient excuse ; Ivy was content to obey when assured that she was not failing in filial duty.

Even in their absence, Ethert found it sufficiently difficult to play for the first time a leading part in a ceremony necessarily painful and practically public. It was still harder, when the late baronet's remains were once consigned to the Elizabethan vault of the family, to receive and answer the numerous speeches of mingled condolence and congratulation which reminded the successor at once of his title, his marriage, and his inheritance. Impossible to have maintained befittingly before those interested and watchful hundreds the appearance of tenderness, compassion, and contentment due to the orphaned bride—intolerable to have failed therein ; well indeed that she was absent !

The funeral *cortége* dispersed, Ethert acknowledged to himself very unwillingly the immediate necessity of seeking his aunt and cousin, whom he had scarcely seen that morning. This

meeting would probably be critical. Even if without evident discourtesy, without trying too far Ivy's unquestioning patience, he could still maintain his ambiguous attitude, still avoid all direct recognition of their actual relation, he felt sure that he would not be permitted to do so. Studiously silent as she had been since his return, he was aware that Lady Glynne was but awaiting this moment to force him to an instant and decisive avowal—if necessary by a direct and very embarrassing question; and he had not yet determined what he meant to say, scarcely even what he wished to do. So paramount was his sheer nervous dread of that meeting, that it was with a strong sense of relief that he received the announcement of a visit involving another but a secondary embarrassment. The card brought to him in the library was that of Mr. Verner, the chief of his uncle's supporters, the leader of the Tories of Stapleton; the first after the funeral to greet the new possessor of Glynnehurst formally by his title, as the representative at once of Sir Charles's political friends and of his non-agricultural tenantry.

“Sir Ethert,” said the manufacturer, a man of practical business intelligence and of somewhat more than average culture, “I ought perhaps to apologise for the manner in which I pressed by telegraph and by letter for an answer to a question that might seem untimely. Pardon me if I say that politics, like war, require a certain suppression of personal feeling. Too much is at stake in the interest of the living to allow us to think primarily of respect to the dead. But perhaps my question was addressed too directly to the owner of so large a property in Stapleton, and too little, as would have been more appropriate, to the representative of the late member’s family.”

“Your question,” replied Ethert, suppressing as completely as possible the vexation and discomfort he felt, “was as appropriately put as I had hoped my answer was explicit. I can only say once more that my marriage with Sir Charles’s daughter gives me no shadow of right to interfere in the politics of Stapleton, or to control the votes of her tenantry.”

“Of course, of course, Sir Ethert,” returned the other, in the tone in which a man of business accepts a proper but meaningless formality. “But, that understood, may we not assume that under the circumstances, if you do not care to appear on the hustings, you will consent to be nominated as Sir Charles’s successor?”

“I appreciate the compliment, but I thought I had declined it distinctly enough.”

“We are sure to carry you, Sir Ethert. Indeed I do not think there will be any opposition—to you.”

“I must beg you, Mr. Verner, to take me at my word.”

“It is true that the General Election cannot be far off; but any one whom we bring forward now will feel a little cavalierly treated when called upon to make way for you; or you might have some scruple in ousting him.”

“Mr. Verner,” Ethert returned, speaking more peremptorily and with less of formal courtesy than before, “I have no idea of standing for Stapleton under any circumstances whatever.

It is never wise to give an absolute pledge for the future; but I can hardly conceive the case in which I should feel entitled to oust a Conservative freely chosen by your votes."

"Sir Ethert, there is hardly another seat left like this. The owner of Glynnehurst, unless he should wantonly offend the feeling of the electorate, may be absolutely sure of holding it for life, and may vote with more freedom than almost any other man in the House."

"I am quite aware of it, but I must beg you to take my answer as absolute and final."

The visitor looked much disappointed and not a little perplexed. "I had supposed you a keen politician, Sir Ethert; but at any rate, if you will not stand yourself, you will tell us whom you would recommend, to whom your interest will be most willingly given?"

"I have done my best," replied Ethert, somewhat annoyed by this persistency, "to explain that I have no interest, and no right to interfere. I shall be glad to hear of the return

of any gentleman on whom the choice of my uncle's friends may fall. If I had a preference in the matter, which I am not entitled to express," he continued—feeling for the moment as if the political influence of Glynnehurst were a part of Ivy's inheritance which on her behalf he had no right to throw away by offending its most influential supporter—"no result would give me more pleasure than to see my uncle's oldest and best friend in the borough succeed him as its representative."

The compliment, appealing to his own secret ambition, restrained as that had been by circumstances, almost compensated Mr. Verner for what had appeared to him the perverse silence of his powerful neighbour.

"I could not," he replied after suitably acknowledging the courtesy, "I could not at present leave my business, Sir Ethert, for half the year, and I therefore am out of the question. But if you have really resolved not to stand yourself, I suppose you have thought of a successor to Sir Charles?"

"Certainly not! It is your business, not mine."

“Then, may we make it understood that your influence, your wishes will be given to any candidate brought forward by the party?”

“I have no vote,” Ethert returned, “and no pretension to influence the opinion of a single elector. Really, Mr. Verner, I thought I had spoken plainly enough in my letter, and I can only repeat as plainly what I then said.”

Wholly ignorant of the circumstances which made the speaker more unwilling to assume a right apparently derived through his wife than if it had really so come to him, the local politician could only suppose that some personal disgust had rendered Sir Ethert Glynné secretly averse to forward the interests of the party whose colours he could not openly desert. It was with manifest mortification that he took his leave, without being able to elicit a more favourable reply.

CHAPTER IV.

HELD FAST.

AFTER Mr. Verner's departure, though the conversation had left him in a mood yet more irritable and uncomfortable than before—the sacrifice he had made to pride and consistency deepening and embittering the determination on which he had acted—Ethert felt that he could no longer withhold the attention due, if not to his bride or her mother, certainly to the widow of him whose remains had just been consigned to the family vault; to the mistress of the house in which, if he would not assume the master, he must consider himself a guest.

A few sentences of course had passed before his aunt put the question the answer to which,

as she knew, Ivy anxiously expected, though she could not find courage herself to ask it.

“Mr. Verner has been with you, Ethert, has he not? They want you to stand for Stapleton? I know from your boyhood a seat in Parliament was the summit of your ambition, and this”—speaking in a lower tone—“Ivy would not wish you, would not like you to sacrifice such an opportunity to formal consideration for....the occasion.”

“In this case at least,” Ethert, replied, disdaining to affect a conventional scruple he did not feel, or avail himself of a false excuse, “in this case, and probably for life, I must forego an ambition which I share with most educated Englishmen.”

“You don’t mean that you have refused, Ethert?” Ivy said, surprised into interposition. “Mamma heard,” she added timidly, “though rather roundabout, that they were sure to return you; they had waited only for....for to-day to propose it. Ethert, why?....surely it is not—you cannot think it would please me that you should decline?”

“Does it not? You can hardly know what

Parliamentary life is, then, Ivy ; and I can afford neither the cost nor the time. My professional work is as much as I can manage, and occupies me during nearly all the hours that the House sits, and many besides."

Ivy was simply perplexed. She had a pretty accurate idea, though how formed she hardly knew, of the amount of Ethert's professional earnings; and little as she knew of her own pecuniary position, she was aware that those earnings could hardly be a matter of consequence, certainly not worth the sacrifice of a great political opportunity, to the owner of Glynnehurst. It had never occurred to her that Ethert would not at once resign a post so laborious, compelling him to live in London, which as she knew he intensely disliked, and incompatible with the duties of a resident proprietor. That residence was a duty, on an estate which had for several years been not a little neglected, she had insensibly and imperfectly learnt—chiefly from Ethert himself.

"Ethert, you don't mean that you have not given that up? At any rate you will? That

could not prevent your going into Parliament if you had wished it."

"I have as little idea of giving up my profession as of sitting for Stapleton," he answered, with a coldness and sternness that startled his timid bride, but were really the expression of discomfort and apprehension. This discussion, he felt, was sure to lead to a declaration of his views on other points; and in a manner peculiarly awkward.

"But, Ethert, why? Surely you mean to live here, not in London?"

The frightened perplexed expression of her face, the faltering tone, made him anxious to answer as gently, to startle her as little as he could.

"I am sorry," he said quietly, "if you dislike the idea of a London life so much. I thought young ladies generally looked forward to it very eagerly at first, however weary of it they may become after a few seasons."

"You know I have been in London twice, Ethert, with Papa and Mamma. They took me nearly everywhere, and—I did not care for it. I should never care for any London

pleasures half as much as for our home here. But, Ethert, you know I was not thinking of that, of myself; surely you are wanted here? You have often spoken of the importance of a landlord's position and influence; that was perhaps what I best understood in your story, in which Charlie said you had described Glynnehurst. And, Mamma, has there not been a good deal here that has been neglected, that wants Ethert's presence and attention to set it right?"

"I am afraid so, Ivy," Lady Glynne replied, not a little disturbed by Ethert's unexpected determination, and feeling even more apprehensive than himself as to the probable turn of the conversation.

"Glynnehurst, Ivy, is yours, not mine. It would not suit me, or any man who respects himself, to be simply the steward of his wife's property."

Happily for Ivy, the very idea underlying this speech was so utterly strange to her that Ethert's meaning failed to reach her mind. She understood only that he chose to regard and treat her as indisputably the heiress of Glynnehurst, in

fact as well as in name ; and this she accepted as a proof of delicate and considerate generosity. But to her thought her rights, her possessions, even if they were hers, were not merely shared with but transferred to her husband—had become on their marriage as completely his as had they been unquestionably his by birth. That what he could earn was in any more especial sense his own, that earning nothing he could have deemed himself less independent, was a thought which happily had no meaning for her. Could she have realized it, it would have wounded even more than at present it bewildered her. Though hurt, therefore, rather by his tone than his words, she was infinitely less hurt than most women would have been by a similar expression ; and her pain was less acute than her sense of his courtesy in abdicating the right which—as she at least strongly suspected—he believed to be his own.

“Ethert, I don’t understand, but I know you mean that kindly ; but it does not seem quite kind—and you know in any case Glynnehurst is yours now. And surely you cannot speak as if you would be idle here. I heard you say to

Charlie, more than once, there was quite enough to do on an estate like this; as much as its owner can find time and strength for."

If Ivy did not understand, her mother did: and had listened in speechless dismay. A seat in Parliament had, as she truly said, been from boyhood the avowed and supreme object of Ethert's ambition. His refusal to accept that which for two centuries had been the appanage of Glynnehurst could hardly mean anything but a peremptory, probably a public repudiation of Glynnehurst itself; and gave a serious and painful significance to his declaration that her father's inheritance was Ivy's, and not his. And his obstinate retention of an obscure laborious employment, obliging him to the London life which he avowedly abhorred, could have no other motive; it must mean that, at any cost to both, he would avoid the necessity of appropriating to his personal use a penny of the income that was nominally his wife's. His earnings could hardly defray the mere personal expenses suited to his real position.

Was Ivy to learn, as her first conjugal

experience, that her husband would not touch her fortune?—she whose pride and whose conscience had been reconciled to the marriage by the prospect of enriching him! The young bride could not but be cruelly, deeply wounded when she should come to understand an intention so strange; and the wound was one that by its very nature could never be healed or forgotten. Worst of all—what lay before her if Ethert's resentment were so deep, so bitter, so hard as such a resolve would imply? And, occupied night after night with the regular desk work of London journalism, did he mean to abandon a wife of seventeen to the utter dreariness of a solitary home, or to the peril and *inconvenience* of a separate life in London society, while neither at home nor abroad could she be her husband's companion? Yet he must mean this, or much worse—unless—did he perhaps intend that the mother should be her daughter's guest and chaperon?

Selfish as fear could on occasion render her, Lady Glynn's selfishness was not of the kind that could reconcile her to such an idea. She now knew but too well that Ivy had yet to win

her husband's heart; she had begun to understand that without this conquest her child's affectionate nature, perhaps her actual love for Ethert, would render her utterly miserable; and her only chance was that she should be left, at least for the first months or years of their married life, alone with and dependent upon him. The mother could not speak; she felt instinctively that her presence could do no more than restrain the free expression both of Ethert's and of Ivy's meaning. In her absence it was possible that, before he was committed by any declaration such as the young bride could and must understand, her evident affection, her unhesitating loyalty, the appeal which alone with him she might probably venture to his conscience and his feeling, might reach a heart on which she could not yet have lost her hold. It was for once a judicious impulse on which Lady Glynne acted, in seizing the best excuse she could invent at the moment for leaving the young couple alone.

"Don't be vexed with me, Ethert," said Ivy timidly, as soon as she felt herself no longer constrained by her mother's presence, "if I

say that I am disappointed. I did think you would have chosen—I knew you wished to get into Parliament. I had dreamed of that for you: I thought that now... that that had been made possible.”

“Are you so ambitious, Ivy? Do you think that any social importance a seat in Parliament, or even Parliamentary eminence, can confer on a member’s wife would be worth the trouble, the labour, the late hours and the confinement that Parliamentary life involves?”

“Ethert, somehow I don’t seem now to understand half you say. It is my fault of course, and I know I am dull; but I used to understand you. Surely you know I did not think of myself: it was for you I was ambitious—how could I be ambitious for myself?”

Her simplicity and singleness of heart could not but touch him, the more that he felt how thoroughly truthful was her repudiation of those lower objects of female ambition which she could not even comprehend.

“I will not trifle with you: I will not tell you that I have ceased to care for politics or

ceased to think that I could succeed in Parliament. But I have chosen another line of work, one with which Parliamentary ambition is not compatible, and I cannot or will not give it up."

"Then, Ethert," she asked timidly, but more than half hopefully, and as if the new thought that had occurred to her would easily console her for the abandonment of her dream of unselfish ambition, "if you will not go into Parliament, you can stay here always—I mean," seeing a negative in his face, "except when you care to go up for a while, when you want to see things or people in town. That would be so pleasant, Ethert: I know you love the country and Glynnehurst, and—I should be happy anywhere with you, but I think you would be happiest here."

"This time, Ivy, you certainly don't understand me. It is not that I mean to be idle, or am too lazy for the hard work and late hours of Parliament. My own work is quite as hard, and I do not mean to give it up."

At last she did understand his purpose, not his motive; and her dismay was evident in her face.

“Ethert, I don’t mean to be presuming or inquisitive. I don’t ask anything you do not choose to tell me; only I cannot understand that, I cannot see...surely it is not necessary—surely you earn nothing that we could not spare? Indeed, indeed I would rather give up anything that you think we can. You know Mamma never taught me to be extravagant; surely you can do without that? And your hours, your work, I feel sure, are far harder than Papa’s were when Parliament was busiest. Three or four nights in the week he was at leisure; and you seem to be engaged every night till near morning.”

“Six nights a week, Ivy, at any rate. Yes, it is harder work than Parliament.”

“Then will you not consider, Ethert; will you not try? I cannot bear to ask you about money, especially when you say...Ethert, it is *not* mine; and if you call it so, I cannot speak. But if Papa could afford to live here and to be in Parliament—I know the elections cost him a great deal—surely you can afford it without Parliament? Indeed I will try to manage as well as Mamma has always done: and I would

give up anything, everything, rather than let you go on with that work. Can you not try, at least?"

Ethert was deeply embarrassed. He could not bear to accept Ivy's renunciation of her natural right to enquire, to hear the full truth as to the amount and expenditure of her own income. He could neither silence nor evade her simple pointed appeal. Yet to answer her frankly was to admit clearly and distinctly the absolute needlessness of the sacrifice on which he insisted, to force upon her the perception of his motive.

"A man must have his own work, his profession, Ivy; and having chosen it, it is hardly a man's part to throw it up."

"True, Ethert, perhaps; if Glynnehurst had not come to you, if Charlie had lived. But surely, when Providence has sent you other work, and wealth that I suppose must make your earnings indifferent to you—surely you may? And, Ethert, surely your duty is here? Forgive me, do forgive me," she added, observing his change of countenance and unable to understand it, but fearing that her urgency

had given offence, that her insistence on a duty of which he was the fitting and much more competent judge had been presumptuous and unbecoming; "I daresay I ought not to have said it—do not be angry, Ethert."

"You have said not a word, Ivy, you have asked nothing that it is not your right to say, and my duty to answer. As regards your income and expenditure—what you have, and what you can afford, and what you would wish to do—you shall have a full, clear explanation."

"Mine, Ethert!" she interposed. "I wish you would not say that."

"Yours, Ivy, most distinctly. I must tell you frankly that it is not a mere question of what you can afford, though there are, I fear, demands on your income—the estate requires expenses, outlay that has been neglected for years—that will render your real income much less than the nominal rent-roll, at least for the present. But I can hardly make you understand why I do not choose to give up my profession: and if you will pardon me, I would rather not discuss it with you."

“But, Ethert, will you not think it over again? I know you hate London life, and I am sure we should be so much happier—at least you have always made me so happy here; and if your hours are so long and so late, surely——” She checked herself, hardly knowing how to express her meaning without seeming selfish or exacting. Her thought was “how much we shall be apart,” but she feared to convey to him only how dreary it would be for her.

“I know, Ivy, you would find London life very hard under the conditions of mine, and I do not wish that you should try it. Remember that Glynnehurst will always be kept up. Though I am tied to London, you need not be; and here, I suppose, you will have your mother’s company.”

One part of his speech was so strange, so perplexing, that it reached Ivy’s mental sense but slowly; and before she had realized its meaning her attention was diverted for a moment by the last suggestion.

“Do you mean that? Do you wish it, really? Mamina spoke as if she must leave the house presently—at any rate before we returned to

it. I could not answer; I knew I must not speak till I was sure what you intended. Ethert, do not be displeased with me—is she right?”

“What do you wish, Ivy? It is your concern in every way. I could not interfere, unless it were to save you the pain or awkwardness of saying what you mean.”

“Interfere? But, Ethert, I do not think I ought to express, to have a wish, till I know what you would desire. And what can you mean? You speak as if I could leave you . . . as if—you had forgotten—everything. You speak not of ‘us’ but ‘you’ and ‘me,’ and you seem to fear that I shall think it hard when you are busy, because I must be lonely. Surely you do not think it was for that that I asked you? . . . Ethert, if you had asked me . . . of your own accord . . . to be your wife, should I have made conditions, wanted you to give up anything? And now when I am yours, when it has been I am sorely afraid, more afraid every hour, for my sake rather than your own, do you suppose . . .? No, Ethert, I *cannot* understand.”

He was silent, fully realizing for the first time how sincerely, how loyally Ivy was prepared to accept her new relation, how absolutely she acknowledged its reality ; that she would see in its origin only a deeper reason for implicit conjugal devotion—and he foresaw clearly the difficulty and danger of attempting to palter with obligations which she accepted in such absolute good faith. If to her mind their union was as complete, as real as anything could make it, if she would not even admit to her own mind any separate right, any distinct interest of her own, it would obviously be no easy thing to maintain that complete severance of their rights and possessions, that repudiation of all control over hers, on which his sensitive pride was bent.

He could take his own way on such a point, but he could not command her acquiescence ; she would evidently misconceive his idea of independence, and feel that in rejecting the dowry he was in spirit and at heart repudiating the bride. And evidently the same principle would govern her view of the more delicate and more pressing question. She might cling to her home and to her mother ; might fear his temper ; might

dread and hate the duty she fulfilled; but only at the cost of something painfully like a quarrel would he be able to leave Glynnehurst without her.

As he would not explain, Ivy forbore to press her questions, somewhat hurt, but more or less conscious that Ethert was in a sore and resentful mood; and thinking that the only thing she could do, the best and kindest, was to pass over not merely without complaint, but without notice, expressions which, as she began to recognize, had reference to the conditions of their marriage; to treat these as mere expletives of pain or irritation, such as her father had been wont to use in physical suffering.

"There is another thing," she said presently, not without hesitation. "Perhaps I ought not to say it; but if I did not speak, Mamma would; and somehow, though that would be easier for me, I think we had better be open with each other. I begged her to leave it to me."

"It would be well," he interposed, "if you would always take that course. I do not pretend to claim from you, treated as you have been, the

loyalty, the silence that are matter of simple duty with other wives. I do not presume to blame you for complaining of me to your mother. But I will notice no complaints that come to me at second-hand, however just and reasonable. If you have cause to find fault with me, do so to myself; I will always hear you patiently and respectfully. But if you again make her the mouthpiece of your displeasure, you must not expect me to answer either of you."

"What do you mean, Ethert? Complain of you? Of what? And what has Mamma said? What could she say? Do you think I gave her a message to you, as if I could not write or speak myself? Was I wrong not to write first? I thought—I wished—it was not pride, Ethert, but I thought—I feared if you wished to hear you would have written. I answered you as soon — at once — when you did write."

"You did, Ivy. But it was from your mother that the complaint of my letters came; it was she who found fault with their number and with their tone."

"Ethert, how could she? She never saw

them, not a word. And what... Complain! Was I wrong—perhaps I was—to ask her advice? I would not have done so if you had been with me, or if I had known how to write it. But I never thought, I never meant she should say it to you: I would have told you myself—I will tell you now. I asked what I could have done, what offence I could have given, as I had asked you. I thought you did not like to tell me, to find fault so soon, and I asked her—she knows of course all that I do not know, and it was to her you spoke and trusted everything—why you were so different, why you did not speak to me as when... we were only cousins? I did not see—I don't see now, but I suppose I was wrong: I suppose it seemed like complaint. Yes; I ought to have kept it to myself; I ought not to have told her that you were displeased with me, or that it was you made me unhappy; but I did not understand. Now, Ethert, do forgive me; I will never say a word again."

"There is nothing to forgive," he answered, thoroughly ashamed, "except my own ungenerous temper. I ought to have understood how natural it was, especially in my absence, that you should

“speak ; how natural that she should not be wise enough to keep your counsel. Forgive me, Ivy.”

“No, Ethert, I was wrong ; but I did not see. Now, may I ask you? Mamma—no, it was my own thought, but it came—I wish to be quite true—it came of something I think you said to her ; as if I should not—as if you could not bear my . . . my mourning now.”

“Your mourning?” he said, puzzled for the moment, till he remembered the manner in which his thought had been conveyed to the mother. The word, not the thought, had it seemed been repeated. “No, Ivy, that was not what I meant.”

“Then you will not ask me—I mean you do not wish me—to put it aside? I would rather not, but I know it is strange. But it was not that. Ethert—you will not go back, you will not leave me here again?”

She was, to use his own phrase, in her right. Even to Ethert’s peculiar temper and fastidious sentiment, the request might under other circumstances have seemed becoming and dutiful. The tone in which it was preferred was gentle, deferential, and almost timid. It would have been

frightened and faltering, had Ivy dreamed how unwelcome was her proposal, or had she realized even yet the possibility that Ethert could answer her harshly, or refuse a reasonable entreaty from her lips.

He actually started, surprised and shocked at the moment by a suggestion so utterly unexpected—from her. That her mother would attempt to force his hand by some such demand openly or insidiously preferred, he had anticipated, and was in a humour to resist any such pressure with all the force of his will. But Ivy's personal appeal, though it offended his taste, grated on his feelings, and was intensely repugnant to his present mood, was much more difficult to meet.

Happily she had not seen his start. Her eyes had naturally been cast down as she spoke; and it was not until his silence had somewhat surprised her in her turn that she looked up to seek her answer in his countenance. Impossible then to misconceive her motives; doubly impossible for Ethert, with his profound faith in the purity, his thorough insight into the perfect simplicity of her nature. The sweet

serenity of the untrembling mouth, the loyal frankness of the upturned eyes, even the slight colour that had touched the cheeks, giving to that lovely face the only beauty it seemed to lack, bore conclusive testimony to the absolute singleness of her thought. It was her conscience, hardly even her heart that appealed to his; it was her duty, not her right, that she had claimed. If she thought at all of what was due to herself, it was not to deprecate neglect or coldness, but to protest against a separation that must wound her self-respect and wrong her loyalty; a wholly unmerited indignity to her feelings as woman and wife, proclaiming either that Ethert did not want her, or that, as it seemed to her, she could flinch from the first sacrifice of self-will or personal convenience required by her marriage.

Ethert did her justice at once—understood her so well that he was quite unable to answer. Indeed, if she were as sure of her ground as her request would seem to indicate,—if she had spoken not on the impulse of the moment, but on deliberate reflection or consultation with her mother—what answer could there be? He had

himself declared that the question was one for her sole decision; if that decision were spontaneous, there was an end of the matter. But spontaneous, sincere, genuine it *could* not be; she was surely coerced once more, either by her mother's urgency or by the force of her remembered vow. Pride and pity, conscience, compassion and instinct alike revolted from the acceptance of a sacrifice no less hateful, whether extorted by physical or spiritual compulsion; a sacrifice whose full horror of darkness would surely be realized when too late. And yet—argument was impossible and objection ungenerous and insulting; what could he say?

“What I told your mother,” he said at last, evasively reverting to the point she had originally misconceived, “was this—that I could not and would not pretend to claim a bride in her first mourning for a father.”

“It was like you, Ethert; it was kindly and considerately meant. But, in mourning or not, I am your wife, and my place is with you. It was my duty; it was your right to have claimed it at once. Papa would have said so himself; and now . . . Besides, Ethert, it is mistaken

kindness. While you could stay here I might have wished it for Mamma's sake—but I find she does not wish it; and for myself... Ethert... I have always been happiest with you, and... it is right....”

This time he did not understand her; rather he understood one aspect of her thought so well that he lost all clue to the other. In speaking of her own feelings her voice had sunk almost to a whisper, her cheek flushed, and her downcast eyes filled with tears. But had she been conscious of a new element in those feelings, of a love different from that she had ever borne to her cousin, Ethert judged rightly that she could not have spoken at all. He ascribed her novel shyness to the struggle between duty and repugnance. It never occurred to him that duty had been sweetened, doubt and fear allayed, repugnance prevented by the unconscious, open, confident love of the young girl for her near relative, her only intimate friend; that there was now no struggle, no effort in her conjugal fealty.

“Would it look well, Ivy?”

She was hurt, and showed it, though the pain

was not that which such an evasion, such a hint might well have caused.

“Does that signify, if it *is* well, Ethert? It will not hurt Mamma; and...it would be a false pretence of feeling. If it is my crape—I told you I would leave that off if...if you really wish it.”

“No, no, Ivy,” he answered quickly. “Nothing that can hurt your feelings could meet my wish; and for forms of that kind either way I care...less perhaps than I ought. But when—when I came down last, I had obtained leave of absence for a month, expecting to want it. Then Lestrangle told me and I agreed that in a month I must return; and now, while Parliament is sitting, I cannot be absent, I must go back at once.”

“Very well, Ethert; I am ready, whenever it is necessary.”

“Yes; I know, Ivy, you would always be ready to do what you think your duty. But I should feel it most unkind and unjust to exact such a sacrifice. I did not expect it, and...I have never known what to expect, so as to make any arrangement for you. Of course

you would prefer to wait—I don't quite think it would be wise to go to the expense of furnishing a house, at least until you see how London suits you—but with your mother's help you might find a furnished house for this year. There is no reason why you should not wait till you can do that—till we see our way."

"What is there to see, Ethert?" she enquired, perplexed and almost dismayed; speaking softly and gently as ever, but unable to restrain the trembling voice, the quivering lip that betrayed her wonder and distress. "If you do not wish to have me with you...I promised to obey... Of course I must stay here if you command it. But that means... Ethert, what is the matter? You know I must feel, if you leave me here, that you are showing displeasure, keeping me in disgrace; and if you do that, surely you will tell me why? Indeed, indeed I don't know—what have I done?"

Few women appreciate the power that lies in absolute submission—or perhaps few wives care to rely on a strength that only avails them when not clearly in the wrong. Ethert could have

wished that his young bride would have broken into passionate rebellion. Had she resented his consideration as a slight, he would gladly have left with her the responsibility of a justifiable quarrel—have accepted the blame of an open rupture. Had she insisted on her right, he could have raised difficulties; but even the caprice of Oriental despotism could hardly punish and refuse the reason. By accepting his will, while showing that she distinctly recognized not forbearance offered but humiliation inflicted, Ivy had rendered any such humiliation impossible.

“If you take it in that light, Ivy, I can say no more. No fault of yours could give me the right to show displeasure”—he did not choose to answer her look of surprise and deprecation—“and in so far you are altogether faultless. Pray don’t misunderstand me; I did not mean, I should be sorry and ashamed to hurt you—especially at such a moment and . . . and in such a matter as this . . . Only remember I do not ask, I could not ask you to leave your home at present. I claim nothing, I expect nothing that is painful to yourself; and when you

repent your proposal you are free to revoke it. I shall not be surprised, and certainly I shall not complain."

"Ethert, what *do* you mean? Surely you would tell me if I had vexed you; and you know my home is with you. Do you think I do not wish it? Or...do you forget...? If London is not so pleasant as Glynnehurst, what you must bear is surely good enough for...your wife."

The gentle emphasis on the last syllable rendered Ethert instantly and thoroughly ashamed of his ungracious response to her loyal self-sacrifice. It grieved as well as embarrassed him to recognize how sincerely she accepted, how earnestly she sought to fulfil her share of a thankless, unwilling, unreal compact; and for the moment he felt more acutely the immediate unkindness and discourtesy of reluctance than the deeper cruelty of acquiescence.

"Forgive me, cousin, if you cannot understand; and don't underrate yourself so far as to fancy that your companionship could ever be unwelcome. I am afraid you will very soon see why I could not bear to take you from such

a home. Meanwhile, forgive me, Ivy. I did not mean it, though you have felt it, as a slight."

"Not a slight," she replied gently, "but as a mark of your displeasure, and one not easy to bear. You reproved me, and quite justly, for letting Mamma see when I thought you were angry with me. Surely, if you meant to punish me, you would not wish every body to know it."

"And therefore," he answered quickly, much moved, and eager to soften the pain still evident in her voice and look, "you might be sure no such thought was in my mind. But if I were not afraid to hurt you, I should still beg you to reconsider. It is *not* your duty, Ivy, unless . . . unless you are willing. There is no need—I mean—your sacrifice need not and shall not be enforced—be carried faster or further than you choose."

Her mother had carefully withheld from Ivy her own misgivings—had indeed, in dread of rendering her alive to the meaning of words and incidents, observed a strict and careful reticence since first the subject of the marriage had

been mooted ; and plainer language than Ethert's would have failed to give his girlish bride the slightest glimpse of his thought.

"Ethert, if you would not dwell upon that—I know you mean it so kindly, but I hardly feel true when I let you say so I could not like it, neither did you but that is over. My sacrifice at any rate is made done with. And now, do you not know ? at any rate you need not forget that you are speaking to the cousin you were so so kind to and always made so much of while she was with you."

"And whom I loved from her cradle as a favourite sister," he answered ; knowing what word would have been substituted for "kind" had Ivy dared now to feel sure even of his past "fondness," and eager to give the one loving assurance that would not be a lie. Again he misunderstood the reluctance Ivy confessed, failed to understand that her admission of dislike referred to the haste which had shocked and startled her, and to which she ascribed his own expressions of regret and compassion.

“ Well, Ivy, Glynnehurst is always yours, your home ; always within your reach ; and I suppose your mother will be here to make it easy for you to return at will.”

“ You mean that ? You really wish it, Ethert ? I mean about Mamma.”

“ If it be your wish, Ivy. It is your business, not mine ; it is for you to decide. But if you feel no awkwardness, if you and she can arrange without difficulty how the management of the household is to remain in her hands or to pass to yours, I shall be glad, more even for your sake than for hers, that you should have her company, her help and counsel, as long as you wish it yourself.”

“ But,” she said shyly—encouraged, as she was ever so easily encouraged, at any word that seemed like a renewal of the kindness she had so long taken for granted—“ I shall have you to myself in London. It is only here—and, Ethert, it is not that I want any other company than yours ; but somehow it does seem so unkind to turn a mother out of her home when her husband is gone and her own children succeed to it. Of course I have seen it happen in other homes ;

but it has always seemed to me so strange that any man can bear to treat his mother, or even his wife's mother, so."

"A mother-in-law," said Ethert, suppressing a smile, "would hardly, I think, do wisely to remain under the same roof, with her son's wife as its mistress. With your own mother of course the case is different. At any rate I could not ask you, could not wish you to part with her, even if she and I had not always got on so well."

"Thank you," Ivy answered earnestly. "It is very kind of you; you are always so kind when there is anything to do, anything to decide. I suppose it is only fancy that makes me feel as if well, as if I had done something to change you very much since you were fond of your child-cousin. Well then, Ethert, when you must go back you will tell me, and I will be ready whenever you please."

"I must not desert my post, Ivy, and throw my duties upon my chief a day longer than is absolutely necessary. I ought to return almost immediately; but I am ashamed and most un-

willing to take you from such a home to a place and a life that have nothing of home about them. I am afraid you will find the solitude intolerable."

"Ethert, I wish you would not say such things, as if you thought so ill of me—that... that I cared so much for everything else, and so little for my duty to you. Will it be more lonely for me than for other wives?—I suppose many men who work as you do are married?"

"Few, I hope, to ladies so young as you are: and their wives complain sorely."

"Well," she answered cheerfully, "I cannot. You have told me before-hand what I am to expect; and if I seem dull, if I am stupid, Ethert, you will be patient with me, I am sure."

Here the discussion dropped. However vexed, for her sake and his own, to find himself so easily and so completely baffled, the conversation had left Ethert better disposed towards his bride, if nowise more reconciled to the marriage that wronged them both. He felt that he had never fully appreciated her before; certainly he had never given her credit for such clearness of per-

ception, for so much womanly courage. He knew her to be, according to the received distinction, a moral as well as a physical coward, far beyond the wont of her sex; afraid of pain or peril, more afraid of ridicule, difficulty, or disaster. He knew moreover that she was still more susceptible to a kind of personal fear often mistaken for either form of cowardice, yet distinct from both; the dread of human anger apart from its possible consequences—an intense shrinking from harsh words, from scornful sneers or stormy looks. She had once encountered a dangerous fall rather than interrupt her father's conversation by calling Ethert to disentangle her bridle.

She had quailed before Sir Charles's sharp words and sudden frowns; and even her brother had latterly been checked and softened by finding it so easy to frighten and so hard to re-assure her. And yet she had now ventured in pure simplicity on a step from which even high-spirited girls might have shrunk; had pressed her point and pleaded her cause firmly and successfully. And again, gentle as her temper had ever been, the sweet reasonableness, the unresentful submission she had shown ever since

their marriage, and especially in this trying scene, has far surpassed his expectation. But the more he admired and approved her conduct, the more cruel it seemed to accept a sacrifice that would be the heavier as her nature proved finer, firmer, more womanly and less conventional, under the circumstances which tried and developed it.

The subject was renewed when the trio were once more assembled after dinner.

“And when,” said Lady Glynne (the daughter must still be distinguished by her Christian name), “when am I to part with you both?”

Having evinced her desire to fulfil her part and obtained Ethert's promise, Ivy had been content to leave the rest in his hands. Not so her mother. Nervously afraid of every possible miscarriage, and restless perhaps under the influence of an uneasy conscience, she was eager to press Ethert home, to force him to a definite declaration; knowing that if hurried into action or promise he could only answer in one way, while if left to himself he might possibly postpone and procrastinate till some disastrous revelation or some actual quarrel should open the door

of total escape. If once Ivy left her home as his wife, they could hardly be parted : till then, it was always possible that even a partial discovery of the truth should practically annul the marriage.

“It seems cruel to you, and still more cruel to Ivy,” Ethert replied ; “but Ivy refuses to recognize the unkindness I am afraid she will feel but too distinctly and too soon. But if she will not allow me to go back to London even for a few days and return to fetch her, I can only ask whether she can be ready the day after to-morrow ?”

“I will take care that she can,” replied her mother ; and so once more the subject rested.

It happened that evening that Ivy, intentionally or otherwise, had taken leave of Ethert and retired from the drawing-room during her mother’s temporary absence, so that it seemed natural enough that she should come to wish the latter good night in her dressing-room. She lingered, however, as if resolute not to withdraw ; and seeing this Lady Glynne dismissed her maid as early as she conveniently could, though not

without a misgiving that some awkward enquiry, some question or remark she would willingly escape, was reserved for the moment when they should be alone.

“Mamma, what had you said—what did you write to Ethert?”

Partly in surprise, partly in conscious recollection of her own imprudence, chiefly perhaps because afraid what more might follow, the mother remained silent; and seeing this, Ivy continued :

“I suppose, I am sure, you meant it kindly. But—well, perhaps it is best; best that I should be taught at once that I must not ask advice or help from any one, child as I am. It seems hard, but I see it is right, it is necessary. Mamma, when I...when you...you knew he must do as he pleased, that you must leave me to him. It is natural he should be hurt when you told him that he was unkind, as if I had complained of him. Mamma, I shall never say another word; but if I am weak or foolish—if you fancy....remember, I cannot take it kindly another time. If Ethert could be angry with me, severe to me, I should be sure I deserved it;

but even if I had not, nothing that he could say or do could be so hard to bear as interference. I could not bear . . . I would not allow any one to plead with him—for his wife. Leave us to one another, and do not speak again . . . unless it be to tell me of my faults, to remind me why—how much I owe to him, and how little I have a right to expect.”

Ivy's patient loyalty, her unaffected half-conscious confidence in Ethert, saved her from much immediate suffering and many painful doubts and apprehensions. It was but for a moment that she had been forced to suspect him of wilful evasion, of a desire on his own account to escape or postpone the fulfilment of his bond; and what might have struck another as especially unkind, at least inconsiderate—his omission to secure a holiday, however brief, for the commencement of a wedded life beginning under circumstances so strange and trying—appeared to her simply in the light in which he had chosen to present it, as an inevitable necessity. Perhaps she fancied that under her present bereavement she ought not to enjoy or desire anything like pleasure—

seeking, sorely as she needed some such refreshment of heart and spirits, and felt her need.

Her mother for once was wise enough not to enlighten her. To her elder experience and cooler observation, it was evident that Ethert's mood was one which it would be in the last degree dangerous to embitter by remonstrance or exaction. She began to suspect that, hurried headlong into the first fatal step, he had reconciled himself by a vague, half-formed mental reservation which had thus far constantly failed him. She feared that dislike to the marriage was settling and hardening into direct personal resentment towards his bride; a feeling likely in such a nature to be especially tenacious and insuperable. And yet, half re-assured by the remembrance of his life-long affection for his cousin, and by proofs occurring from time to time of the respect and esteem in which he still held her—relying too on Ivy's charms of mind and person, and particularly on an attachment which Ethert could hardly fail sooner or later to appreciate and return—she still hoped that she

had not, in securing her child's good name, exposed her to the heart-breaking misery of an unloving marriage; tried perhaps to see things as she wished rather than as they were.

CHAPTER V.

LAST HOURS OF HOME.

IT was probably her mother's unusual restlessness, rather than Ethert's shrinking from an avoidable *tête-à-tête*, that disappointed Ivy's intention to meet the latter alone at the breakfast-table. The mother could not help discerning or fancying something of nervous expectancy in her daughter's manner; an impression which was confirmed when Ethert appeared, by the rising colour in cheeks now even paler than usual, the unsteadiness, almost trembling of the small hands busy with the breakfast-service, which showed as much agitation as a young bride might have been expected to manifest on the very morning of her nuptials.

There was no corresponding sign of interest in Ethert's manner; his hasty salutation to both,

his immediate absorption in the newspapers and correspondence that awaited him, were so exactly what Lady Glynn had been used to from her husband and son that, except in Ethert, they might have seemed matter of course. But unluckily her nephew's somewhat punctilious courtesy—the effect of a leisurely life and of early maternal training—had, by very force of contrast, made a strong impression on her memory. Ceremonious she had been wont to consider him, and she was instantly conscious that a want of ceremony natural in another was in him deliberately affected. It was not meant to wound or slight them—the man must be both brute and fool who would bludgeon women with rudeness, when cool courtesy may be made to sting like a horse-whip.

What did Ethert want to conceal? She glanced at Ivy; the agitation of hope or fear was evidently changed for the comparative composure of assured mortification. Could they have quarrelled? Had her child already suffered for the provoking maternal interference against which she had protested? If

so, as she had left the cousins engaged in perfectly amicable talk but ten minutes before they parted for the night, Ethert must have spoken or Ivy answered with very unwonted bitterness or violence. Or had there been a comparison of experiences; had her misrepresentations provoked some angry contradiction? Only her conscious insincerity could have prompted such an apprehension. This most dangerous form of conjugal quarrel was out of the question in the present case. Ivy would have believed Ethert's word against her own senses: Ethert had said, in one of Ivy's last school-room scrapes, "You will frighten *la petite* out of her wits, but even then you won't frighten her into a lie."

The mother was quite as nervous, as much discomposed as her daughter had been: and it was just as well that neither of her companions had leisure to mark the sudden changes of her countenance when Ethert unexpectedly laid down the paper and turned to his cousin.

"The day does not promise well, Ivy; and unfortunately I shall be busy the whole morning. In the afternoon I must ask you to give

an hour or so to some matters of business. But in the meantime—after my work is done, and before yours need begin—Ivy, can you spare me the whole afternoon? It is hardly a reasonable request, when I have left you so little time; but—if you don't mind the weather, or if it be at all practicable, I should like a last ride with you. We need not go beyond your own lands; there are places I should like to visit together once more."

But for the last observation, Ivy would have forgotten altogether her conventional aversion to be seen abroad so shortly after her father's funeral; forgotten everything in the one feeling that suffused her cheek with colour and her eyes with tears. That feeling was unmixed delight, delight less in the prospect of a pleasure she had not enjoyed for many weeks—a pleasure never altogether pleasant except in Ethert's company, but with him the greatest of pleasures—than in the fact and the manner of the proposal. She had never forgotten her bitter disappointment, almost the first ever suffered at his hands, when the promised Sunday afternoon's walk had been, not indeed refused, but

completely spoilt, by his determined evasion of the privacy that would have been its charm.

That day had been an epoch in her heart's history. From that first unkindness, that first symptom of constraint and estrangement between them, she dated the succession of calamities that had since darkened her whole life. Till then they had never hurt, never misunderstood each other; since then they had never met and parted without some incident that had renewed the pain, the sense of misconception or alienation. Since then Ethert had never offered, she had never again felt it possible to ask for, such an invitation. Now that it was not given as a favour, but solicited at her hands, it seemed as if he meant that this—the last day of her girlhood, the last on which the ways of old could retain their old sentiment and significance—should renew the pleasantest memories of the past.

Poor child! how should she understand that the past had been destroyed beyond retrieval by the fatal hint of that still recent day; that much more or much less Ethert might be to

her and she to him, but the same never again? The weather! as if she would know whether it were warm or cold, wet or dry, while her eyes and heart were fixed on the countenance that made the storm and sunshine of her life—as if she would forego that ride, refuse his invitation so spoken, though, in Luther's phrase, "it should rain Duke Georges," or, what she feared infinitely more, newts and black-beetles! She forgot to answer, but Ethert at least could not misread the expression of her countenance, and was deeply touched, not more by the evidence it afforded of the present pleasure he had given than by the recollection of pain to which that pleasure bore conclusive testimony.

She was ready half an hour before the time he had fixed, but had tact to spare him the mortification of having kept her waiting, the necessity of an apology. But, watching from her window as the horses were brought round, her figure caught his eye, and he knew at once what her eagerness for the promised pleasure had been—how profound would presently be her indifference to the threatenings of the sky.

It might pour if it pleased when once they had gone too far to turn back: all she feared, had feared the whole morning with more than the anxiety of her childhood, was that the rain might come too quickly and too sharply to allow them to set out.

Her favourite steed was little more than a pony, and as Ethert swung her into her saddle, just as he had been wont to lift the child, the act and its associations so brought back the old feeling of confidence to her heart, the old look, the brightness of childhood to her eyes and cheeks, that, looking into her face, Ethert almost wondered at the change; was almost surprised by the novel beauty of expression too often banished by shyness if not depression, the beauty to which happiness is more or less essential. As he had promised, they did not ride far, but there were several points within their limited circuit to which he seemed to direct her especial attention; neglected buildings, undrained fields, places that evidently demanded the proprietor's care, and, as he once or twice explained, no inconsiderable expenditure. The rain came later than it had been expected, but came at last

in earnest, and both were drenched to the skin before Ethert lifted her again from her saddle at the door of Glynnehurst.

“Don’t loiter a moment, Ivy, in your wet things; but, when it suits you, you will find me in the library. I have one or two papers to show you, and some matters of business to which I must ask your attention before you leave.”

Throughout their ride his tone had been so thoroughly natural and cordial—perhaps the associations of the past affected him almost as much as herself, perhaps he was consciously anxious to make amends for inevitable but to her unintelligible coldness—that she had returned with a lighter heart than she had borne for many a day. Something that might be formal in his present request, perhaps merely the strangeness of his direct proposal to consult her on matters of business for the first time in her life, somewhat startled and chilled her. She chid herself, however, when alone for what seemed so unreasonable a feeling, and it was almost without apprehension, it was certainly with a bright fearless look that she

came down an hour later to the proposed interview.

“Will you sit down, Ivy?” he said, placing her chair at the head of the writing-table, where a number of papers formally endorsed and docketed had been arranged. “I have spent the morning with Mr. Lawson, and now I will show you the results of our work. I had meant that you should have seen him yourself, heard all at first-hand; in future I hope you will do so. But I thought on the whole it was better this first time to explain things to you myself, and not to trouble you with details. It will be easier for you to understand these another time, if you will trust me for the principal facts now. See, these papers bear Mr. Lawson’s initials, though I drew them out for you from his figures; so you may rely on them,—unless,” he added with a smile, somewhat forced—“we were both in a conspiracy to deceive you. You will see exactly how your affairs stand; the rental of the estates, what we think and Mr. Brand thinks ought to be spent upon them, what it will cost to keep up Glynnehurst under

your mother's charge while you choose to remain in London, and what is left you at last to spend there. I am very sorry it seems so little, Ivy; but there are heavy claims we can hardly overlook or refuse, claims that, acting simply as your guardian, I must feel bound to admit. In truth, your father has done nothing for the last five years, of all that the tenantry have reasonably wanted,—the draining those meadows on Porter's farm, the new buildings that were promised at Elmdale and Heatherglade, and a whole list of repairs in Stapleton. And you see we cannot take up money on mortgage, since we must not raise the question which of us has the right. Everything must be paid out of income. It is for you to decide, Ivy, but I think you would rather pinch yourself than not do all that is thought due to your tenantry."

"But, Ethert, what have I to do with it? Of course I must know what I may spend on all you leave in my charge. But why cannot you tell me that, and only that; give me so much for the things I have to manage? Do you think I shall ask you why you cannot

give me more? What have I to do with all the rest? That is your business. If, as you say, you had been my guardian, you would not trouble me, consult me I mean, about these things."

"Yes, I should, Ivy, from the first. I should choose to make you as fully acquainted with your affairs by degrees as you would have to be when my trust was over. But now you are in some sense of age, if in another you cannot be of age whilst I live; and the less I take upon myself in regard to your affairs the better in every way—certainly the more satisfactory to my feelings. Of course I will give you all the help I can; but it is your affair, not mine."

"Ethert, how can that be? You know... was it not the very reason... was it not what my mother urged—that then it would be yours without dispute?"

"Did you think, then, that... that I meant to take your inheritance? I thought *that* at least was made clear! If not, your mother has deceived us both; certainly she has broken faith with me. I insisted that you should be told

the truth on that point. I...consented in order to secure your right, to secure the estate to you in what seemed the only possible way. Then, Ivy, after all, you think, in spite of my aunt's promise, that I—that I married for money?"

"Ethert! how can you? Should I have thought *that* if you had asked...if it had been done before, if I had never known anything? I know there was a doubt—a secret that for our sake you wished to keep; and..."

She had great difficulty in commanding her voice, and felt herself utterly unable to express her meaning. But Ethert began to understand the kind of deception that had been practised upon both, and answered calmly, if coldly:

"It is much the same, Ivy. You think that I doubted, thought that the estates were probably if not certainly yours; at any rate did *not* think—well, that I chose to make sure of them in this way? No! I will have no evasion. You would not stoop, at any rate yet, to say that that was my motive; but you suppose

that that was the truth; that I thought neither your claim nor my own unquestionable, and put an end to the doubt by— Is this your belief, Ivy? Answer in one word; yes or no?”

“But, Ethert, I know you meant to spare Mamma, to spare me—I don’t know what, and...”

“Pardon me, Ivy; answer my question! I know,” he added, with an effort not to let his resentment seem to extend to her who was in any case wholly innocent, “I know you were perfectly true and unselfish; but I ask what was the belief under which you consented? Did you understand that I made a doubtful claim sure, in my own interest, by marrying your father’s child? In one word, Ivy—yes, or no?”

Ivy felt it very hard to give the categorical answer required; almost sure that it must be misconstrued, dreading that it might justify and possibly turn upon herself the anger she felt too plainly in his manner, but could not understand. But this was the first occasion on which the promised obedience had been de-

manded, and she thought, "I must, I said I would."

"Yes," she faltered, "I thought so—was it not true? Ethert, you know how ignorant and stupid I am; forgive me if I misunderstood..."

"That is enough, Ivy. Don't distress yourself; the misunderstanding was no fault of yours. I see it all now; what you thought of my conduct, and what you fancied you were doing for me. That explains your saying that you obeyed my wishes! It is too late for explanation; you will know better one day than to think that I would enrich myself by marriage, even if 'little hand and mickle gold' could have been frankly sued for and freely given. The property is yours, not mine; it is yours to all intents while I live, it shall be your own legally and absolutely afterwards."

"No, no! what do you mean? Do you think I did not wish you to have it? I was so vexed when I heard of Sir Herbert's will; I knew it ought to be yours. Ethert, don't you believe me? It can never be mine, it must go with

the title. I could not bear to wrong any one as you were wronged."

"There is nobody to wrong. The title dies with me; and you—Sir Charles's daughter would be next after me in the entail, if Sir Herbert had settled the estates in the usual way. You ought to be my heiress."

"Not if"—Ivy stopped, colouring painfully. She knew that both baronetcy and estates would descend to Ethert's sons; now for the first time it occurred to her who would be the mother of those sons. She could not allude to the claims of her own possible offspring; and another and prior question touched her more closely.

"Ethert, do you mean... Mamma half owned that there was—that you might, would think that the estates were yours: that the law would give them to you. Do you think that would vex me? But at any rate they are yours now; surely it makes no difference whose they were before?"

"No difference! Is it the same thing whether you were forced into this for my advantage or for your own? The world will

say, of course, that I married a young heiress—too young to have a judgment or a will of her own—for her money; that I took a shameful and dishonourable advantage—but *you* never shall.”

“Oh, Ethert!” she exclaimed, too deeply shocked by this sudden insight into a new aspect of the sacrifice he had made for her to feel at once the sting of his last words. “If I had known, if I could have thought of that—but they cannot say it: no one who knows you could think it.”

“I only know one man,” he replied, “who seems to doubt; and every one else, in the very words of their congratulations, implied that I was a fortunate and enviable—scoundrel.”

“Then,” she said, with unusual firmness, after a pause of a full minute, “let the truth be told, Ethert, whatever it is. Let *us* bear the shame that seems to attach to us, however terrible it may be, rather than you should submit to a false accusation, and one you feel so bitterly.”

“I accepted that disgrace, Ivy, knowingly

and intentionally; it is too late to clear myself at your cost, if I could ever have done so. My bride's honour is mine, her mother's reputation is as precious as my own mother's to me. To let you be humiliated would be to degrade myself."

There was something in this first identification of their interests, in a higher and more than material sense, that softened, and more than softened, the pangs of wounded affection. But Ivy felt extreme pain in realizing how bitterly the outward appearance of their relation had affected Ethert; while to her feminine simplicity, her almost childish inexperience, the preference of his own dishonour to hers appeared more generous than it really was. She knew not what to think or feel, to hope or fear; she only understood that as his sacrifice had been greater, so his bitterness was deeper and more reasonable than she had hitherto conceived. Would he ever be reconciled? What must be his present feeling towards her who had cost him so much, and could give him nothing but the love he had not asked—had almost seemed to repel?

"Ethert," she said at last, in a voice trembling with emotion almost beyond self-control, "how little I knew what you were doing for us—for me! You might well revolt from it, while you were too generous to refuse; you might well seem hard and cold! I understand now why Ethert, if you hate me, I cannot wonder now."

Her eyes were full of tears; her tone, attitude, colour, betrayed the passionate feelings that could find no adequate expression in words; that were feebly represented even in the appealing look into his countenance which accompanied her last sentence—which dared not meet his own, or read in his face the answer it implored.

"But I don't, my little cousin," he answered; lightly, because he dreaded above all things such a storm of hysterical or sentimental passion as must ensue if her self-command were tried too far; kindly, because he pitied and really wished to soothe her. "Give me credit for meaning to do what was best for you, as you wished to advantage me. Well, do you understand?" after a

pause. "Mr. Lawson and Mr. Brand say, and I think, you ought to spend so much on the estates. Glynnehurst will cost so much, and there is only the remainder for all your London expenses. This account is quite simple, you see—do you understand it?"

"I think so."

"Well, and do you agree?"

"Agree to what? What have I to do but accept what you have decided?"

"You have to judge whether you will spend so much money on the estate as they advise, or starve the improvements to avoid being tied down to such close economy yourself. You must take their word that the money is really wanted here."

"That sounds like asking me whether I would do my duty! Ethert, you know what I should say; but it is your business."

"Then say it, Ivy. It is *not* my business, and I cannot well urge you; for I have a direct though very remote interest in the matter. I am your heir, as you are or should be mine."

"Indeed, I don't understand."

“If Don’t you know, if my uncle had left no child, the estates would come to me ; and whatever you spend on them adds to their value hereafter ?”

“Ethert, that is too unkind ! How can it ever be more yours than it is ? I am very ignorant, I know, but I feel sure about that. Whatever was mine is yours now, what was yours is yours still. Is it not so ? Could you not spend every penny as you chose, even if I did not like it ? Don’t tell me about the law ; but, is it not so, Ethert ? Well, then, why use such words, when it is all words ? Don’t tell me of mine and myself ; it is yours, if you cannot endure to say ‘ours.’ Is that only because of what you say people think of you ? If that were all, might you not speak kindly now we are alone together ? And—if it were mine, are you not master ? Do I wish anything but to please you ; or can I do anything but what you will, even if I did not wish ? Have you forgotten already the promise you were so careful to require ?”

“Do you think, Ivy, that I ever dreamed of turning that promise to profit ? You know

better. But we will not quarrel—that was the one thing I *did* mean to make impossible. You see what will be left for all London expenses. It is little enough; it will take one-fourth, I suppose, to pay the rent of a furnished house and the cost of your carriage. It will be different from this, from anything you had a right to expect. But you see here in this account that that”—pointing to the total in question—“is all that is left us?” The pronoun, used in very reluctant compliance with her reasonable remonstrances, gave her a new glimpse of his meaning on a point she had distinctly misunderstood.

“Left *us*? Please don’t be angry, Ethert, but I thought—of course you have expenses—and that,” pointing to a row of figures beneath the one with which they were dealing, “I thought—do forgive me, Ethert, if I am blundering—that was to cover yours.”

It was impossible not to be touched by her timid piteous pleading, more earnestly expressed in her look than even in her words; difficult on the other hand not to be vexed at so persistent a misconception of his own clearly

implied resolve. But the aspect of the mistake that most forcibly impressed itself for the moment on Ethert's mind was simply ludicrous. The utter disproportion between what Ivy accepted for herself and what she would have allotted to him conveyed an unconscious sarcasm on masculine selfishness, so pointed in its unintentional irony, and so absurdly out of place in the present instance, that Ethert could not but smile as he answered :

"I never spent a sixth of that on myself, Ivy—never had it to spend. No, I have nothing to do with that. I cannot explain, except that there are payments on your father's account... which...which for the present you must continue. I am afraid I must ask you to trust—no, I need not, for these payments are made through Mr. Brand, and you shall see his voucher. Of every penny of your income, Ivy, you shall have a full account."

"*My* income? Account to me?" she repeated, in a low sad tone, more of pain than of perplexity. Then, struck by a new and yet more painful thought, "Ethert, what *do* you keep for yourself?"

“What I earn, Ivy.”

“And I think I know what that is; and I know you provide for Meta! And, Ethert, is it true that marriage forfeits a fellowship? Then—then you lose that by—on my account! You cannot mean that you will keep no part of all this money for yourself; you could not be so unkind.”

“You forget, Ivy, how I burden and impoverish you, if you must live in London on what would make you rich here. How could I reduce your means by another penny?”

“I see! I see—too late! You could live here in comfort, far better than in London; you like the place, the life, you have enough to do: you know you are wanted here, it is your duty; and you are sorry for my life in town, and hate it yourself! But you *will* be able to say to yourself—what you would not stoop to say to those who may misjudge you: ‘I gain nothing by my marriage in any case; I should be richer if I had given up all to Ivy as I wished to do’....And, Ethert, it is not that you are too proud to touch a wife’s fortune, though it were all her own, if you loved her. It is...it is

that you will not touch what 'you married me to secure to me;' you will not share—though it really is your own, you will not seem to share—with a wife you..."

She could not speak the bitter word; and once more Ethert was simply compelled to do his best to pacify her; compelled by sheer terror of an outbreak with which he no longer knew how to deal. It was not in his nature to stand by in obdurate silence, an indifferent witness of any young girl's real and bitter sorrow; certainly not when the sufferer was one whom he had so lately been wont to coax and console in lighter troubles. He could not now kiss away Ivy's tears, and calm her sobs with caressing word and touch; neither could he depend on his own self-command if hers gave way. He dared not trust himself in presence of an unrestrained outburst of her pent-up passion of grief and indignation.

"Ivy, don't exaggerate; don't make that utterly miserable which as yet is only unfortunate. You need not think that—what was forced on both—was more repugnant to me than to yourself. Since I could not choose my wife, I may well be

thankful that the one I must accept is the dearest of all I should not have chosen—is one whom I loved dearly as a cousin and a friend ; one worthy of a better man than I, even had I But, if I give little, I will try to exact as little in return ; and if I seem sore and jealous of my independence, can you not understand ? Compelled to take the hand without the heart, could I take anything else ? Could a man, with any manhood in him, accept any gift from one who gave herself under compulsion ? Men are not so dull, so coarse, Ivy ; not so blunt but that we can feel how much there is to make an enforced marriage seem far more cruel, far more loathsome to girls than even to ourselves. The yoke shall rest on you as lightly as I can make it press. Do not ask me to add to its weight the galling burden of a money obligation.”

The words, however kindly meant, were most unfortunately chosen. The thought that prompted the latter sentences was so remote from Ivy’s mind that she failed altogether to appreciate their general truth ; and only realized the terrible hardness, violence of the language in which Ethert, endeavouring to assume her greater aver-

sion to their marriage, implicitly avowed his own. If no word be fitter to express a woman's feeling under a really reluctant and repugnant union, none can so sting and torture her, when even indirectly and by implication employed to describe the reciprocal feeling of the other sex. Needless to say that this implied meaning had not been present to Ethert's mind ; but, conscious how untruly he described her feelings towards him, she recognized the more clearly the hideous force of the term which betrayed his antipathy. She was too deeply pained, shocked, wounded to attempt reply ; and there was something in the supposed revelation—the more fearful that she was aware that it had hardly been intended—which made even tears impossible.

“May I go now?” she asked, rising and half turning from him ; but not as it seemed intending to manifest anger, rather to conceal whatever might be the feeling of the moment. “Ethert, I know I cannot have understood you rightly ; but I am too much hurt, it seems too hard I cannot ask you anything more now.”

“There is nothing for which I need detain you longer. I am sorry to have given you trouble :

more than sorry if, as I fear, I have given you pain or offence. Believe me, it was not my intention. I ought not to have been led or driven into speaking of—what is better left unspoken, even between ourselves, while what is done is not to be undone. I know that you cannot feel for my position; your own seems, is, from your point of view, incomparably harder. You have been very good, very considerate, in trying to ignore these things; in future, let us take them for granted—in silence. Forgive me if you can; the truth is so hard, so offensive, that I could hardly allude to it without seeming wantonly discourteous.”

The last word perhaps stung Ivy at the moment more than all that had preceded it. There was a look not exactly of reproach, still less of scorn, but it might be of wonder—a look that might seem to say: “How can you stoop to a word so utterly out of place, so untrue to your thought?” in her eyes, as she turned them upon him for one moment, while he held the door for her; and it was not till they were compelled to meet at the dinner-table that he saw Ivy again that day.

That evening—the last her daughter was to

spend with her in the home of her childhood, the eve of their first parting—Lady Glynne was naturally disposed to linger longer with her in the drawing-room ; naturally on her guard against an inclination she could not but feel to be somewhat selfish. But once more she found, after a brief absence on some matter of detail connected with the preparations for Ivy's departure, that the latter had escaped to her own room. Then for the first time occurred to her mind a suspicion, which instinct rather than reflection deepened into conviction, that Ivy had deliberately, ever since the first night of Ethert's return, avoided alike the morning greeting and the evening parting in her mother's presence. It could hardly be mere shyness ; the cousins had been all their lives on terms of intimacy more affectionate than, so far as she had seen, appeared to exist between them now. She would fain have persuaded herself to the contrary, but could not help feeling reluctantly sure that, in thus evading her mother's observation, Ivy had sought an opportunity not of winning a momentary tenderness, but of concealing its absence. She could not resist the temptation to profit by the motive, whatever it was, which left

her alone at the last with her nephew, in order once more to plead her daughter's cause.

“Ethert, I cannot let you go without thanking you for your kindness and consideration in sparing me that hasty parting with my home of so many years, which I confess would have been painful, but to which of course all ladies in my position must look forward. You have been better to me by far than I deserve. I know you feel, you must feel that if you are not, you have the right to be bitterly resentful towards me. But, Ethert, if you do resent, remember it must be, it can be, only against me; Ivy—you know, Ethert—Ivy has done nothing that should displease you. If she has erred at all, it has been only in too great deference to her mother's anxiety, her mother's weakness and fear; and perhaps too great a readiness to believe in your affection, because it seemed, it could not but seem, natural that you should return hers... Ethert—you will be kind to her?”

Under the circumstances, it was not unnatural that the mother's anxiety for the fate of the child she had exposed to so much pain and peril should find utterance in these repeated entreaties.

It was certainly natural that Ethert should be deeply irritated by their iteration. Which of the two, so far, had been unkind to Ivy?

“Aunt Caroline,” he replied, very coldly, in the slow hard tone of difficult self-restraint, “you may have reason enough to mistrust me, but I hardly discern the wisdom of expressing your distrust so strongly—now. You knew me, you knew my temper, you were aware what I felt and what you were risking, when you chose to expose Ivy to the chances of my humour, to make her dependent on my kindness or unkindness. It is too late to doubt and fear and plead for her, now—unless— However ill she may be treated, there is only one form of interference that ever is or can be of service to a woman, when once you have given her into a husband’s hands. If you are afraid for her, take that course now—I will not dispute your right or her pleasure—and act while as yet she has suffered nothing at my hands.”

The words were emphasized by a look that Lady Glynne failed to understand. It was not angry, or even sarcastic, still less menacing; but

it was grave and impressive ; the look of a man who meant that his words should be heeded. But she could not face it. She had never dreamed of coming into such perilous conflict with her nephew's resolute will as serious interference between him and Ivy must involve : she knew that she could not have induced the young bride to rebel if she would, and she dared not if she could. A quarrel or separation now, before cause of dissension could have arisen out of the incidents of their married life, could but defeat every object of the marriage ; proclaim to the world that in the marriage itself the cousins—or one of them—had found something utterly intolerable. The scandal would be the talk of London—the favourite conundrum of every drawing-room in Mayfair and Belgravia, every smoking-room around St. James's—till its solution was discovered !

Her look of dismay recalled to Ethert's memory the considerations that his anger had for a moment forgotten ; and he regretted what might have sounded like a defiance to one so utterly helpless.

“ After all,” he added in a different tone, “ as

you think it necessary to remind me, Ivy is my cousin; it is to her only living kinsman that you entrust her. If I make her miserable, I can hardly be very happy. It is natural that you should remember only how hard all this has been on her; that she, who alone is innocent of all responsibility, must bear the chief share of punishment. It is very hard on Ivy; nevertheless, if you mean to treat her as my wife, you must accept the hardship as she has done. Leave us, leave her to make the best of the very bad bargain which was not her choice —nor mine.”

CHAPTER VI.

“TILL DEATH US PART.”

ALMOST every incident of Ivy's first departure from home was painful, inauspicious, suggestive of evil to that superstition of sentiment from which few women still capable of sentiment, few lovers of either sex, are wholly free. Every detail in the circumstances and surroundings of this bridal journey was funereal rather than bridal; and to every gloomy symbol without a cruel significance was given by the inward dread that her marriage had been scarcely happier in its meaning and motives than in its external accidents. The scene was so utterly unlike any similar occasion that she had witnessed or heard of, fancied or dreamed;—I suppose even girls as simple and childlike as Ivy dream of such things, ima-

gination supplying the place of experience, and stimulated by curiosity rather than by instinct.

It seemed ominous that she entered the carriage in deepest mourning, the nuptial veil heavy with funereal crape; and perhaps the very pains she had taken to soften the sombre effect of her dress rendered her more conscious of its inappropriate character. There was, there could be, no gathering even of her humbler friends and well-wishers, no open demonstration of the goodwill, the sympathy, the friendly hopes of which Ivy carried with her as large a share as many a bride who sees no shadow on her path, no cloud on the sky of her honeymoon. Known for seventeen years to every tenant and neighbour, servant and labourer about the home she had seldom quitted even for a few weeks, she was hardly more closely associated in their thoughts and memories with the father and brother she had lost than with the cousin she had married.

No man of middle age but had often and often met them together on foot or on horse-

back; had watched Ethert linger by the child's bridle-rein, while her parents and Charlie, impatient of her timidity, had ridden on before, guiding the little pony that was but too well aware of its mistress's fears, or teaching her to conquer it and them. Not a farmer's wife but had seen them, returning from long rambles, the boyish heir and the vigorous youth alike muddy, torn, weary, the little girl on Ethert's shoulder as neat and fresh as when they started; had thought of this very marriage when the trio, of late years, had called to enquire after an aged mother or an ailing child, or come in to rest after a summer stroll; noting that the young lady's hand always rested on her cousin's, not her brother's, arm, and that, if Charlie had been too impatient or too idle to attend her, Ethert never was.

The unexpected and terrible death of the natural heir had shocked and grieved them all; the sudden marriage had bewildered and astounded them; the ill-omened nuptial journey called forth many a gloomy prediction or conjecture; but none doubted that Sir Ethert Glynné's accession would be the date of new

things, the beginning of a better time for the neglected estate; or that, whatever other clouds might overhang the future of the young couple, they were happy in the fullest mutual love and confidence.

A few of the elder were sure that Glynnehurst was entailed on Ivy; all the rest insisted on believing that the hasty marriage had been concerted in order that Sir Charles might see his daughter secured in possession of her ancestral home, safe under the care of the best husband to whose charge she could have been entrusted, and so might depart in peace.

Therefore, as they drove slowly through the Park and by the lanes that intersected the estate on their way to the station, Ivy became aware that they had passed one small group after another of her own people; never standing as if formally on the watch, always seeming to be there by chance or by occupation, but so many that no mere coincidence could have placed them all on the same route.

Quietly, unostentatiously, but with a mani-

fest kindness of intent that touched her more than the noisiest demonstration of enthusiasm could have done, they took an affectionate leave of the young bride and the new lord of Glynnehurst. Ivy heard a hearty "God bless you both" from one aged couple, whose grand-daughter with her husband had assisted them to a seat beneath a great cedar, just where the road descended the cliff: she remembered how she had last seen that group when Ethert, as representing the House in her brother's absence, had followed their son to the grave: and after that she dared not raise her veil or wave her hand, lest all should see the emotion she would no longer be able to control. But, ever conscious of his every word and look and motion, she was comforted and encouraged by seeing that her companion had chosen to forget all that was painful or exceptional in the situation, save the recent bereavement that would have made anything like levity or rejoicing out of place; that he answered each silent salute, each low-voiced blessing, with a grave earnest kindness of phrase or gesture that seemed to her

exactly suited to the occasion, or to what the occasion would have been, if there had been no deeper, more rankling grief in either heart than those of which the lookers-on were cognizant.

The last greeting was given by the station-master, who for sixteen summers had been wont to give Ethert a cordial welcome, and valued his frank shake of the hand far above "golden fee," as he closed upon them the door of the compartment reserved by his forethought.

As the train moved, Ethert drew down the blinds; and for the first time since their marriage, nearly a month before, the pair were really and permanently, not incidentally and for a chance half-hour, alone together.

Now, as it seemed to Ivy, her wedded duty really began. Now, as Ethert felt, the falsehood hitherto limited to the utterance of a formal perjury became the burden of daily life. It had to be dealt with, for good or evil, as the foundation of a claim that must either be admitted or denied; and he had not yet made up his mind either to abide by or to denounce

the lie he had uttered at the altar. Before the world, however, they were now bound; the bond was riveted on both, no longer to be evaded, no more to be broken without violence, without shame and scandal; never perhaps in this life to be wholly severed. And still he was drifting, as he had drifted from the first, save when his irresolution had allowed a feebler hand to grasp the helm and direct his course

But the moment had its immediate demands. Something was due, in common courtesy, in mere human kindness, to his companion. "It was not her fault;" and she must not be consciously, intentionally punished for it. But how to speak without lying and without wounding, how to be at once true and natural in a position that was neither... Well for both that Ivy's sweet temper and absolute truthfulness rendered her generous where other women are exacting; just and considerate where they only think of the consideration due to them. She felt that Ethert must be at least as much embarrassed as herself, since his constraint arose from conflicting feelings

and wishes, her own chiefly from the perception of his. She knew that she must expect no demonstration of passionate fondness, hardly even the kindness and confidence of their cousinhood; and perhaps her strongest, clearest wish was to make him aware that she desired to exact nothing; to show herself ready to accept just so much of regard and tenderness as he chose to give, and expect no more, so as to remove that apprehensive reserve which rendered him so much colder and more formal, so much less frank and kindly, than seemed to her reasonable or natural.

He had placed her in the most convenient seat by the shaded window; she drew off, with some half-superstitious feeling, the black glove from her left hand, leaving her wedding-ring and its pearl guard uncovered, while she shyly watched his movements, almost fearing that in such a trifle as the choice of his seat she might discern some new sign of alienation. She saw that the rings and the pretty, slender hand they adorned had caught his eye—with what effect she doubted, till he took his seat, not opposite, but beside her; the place he had

so invariably chosen in drives and excursions, at the Lakes and at Glynnehurst, whoever might be their companions, that she had felt it a sort of usurpation if another anticipated him.

This trifle, with such associations, gave her hope and courage; and very shyly, very timidly, she laid the ungloved hand on his. She neither enforced the silent appeal by a look, nor turned her eyes away as if afraid to meet his own; but her heart beat fast as she wondered how this first advance would be answered. She rather longed than hoped to feel once more the gentle, close, somewhat lingering clasp she so well remembered. Was it possible that he would retain the little hand in his as he had often done when, in others' presence and pre-occupied with the elders' talk, he would thus assure the child that her presence was not forgotten, that any wish of hers should have his attention as soon as might be?

She hardly knew whether she was grateful or disappointed, could hardly interpret his thought or her own, when, instead of that affectionate pressure that had meant so much to both, he

lifted the soft slender fingers to his lips, and kissed them twice or thrice. She had often seen him so salute his mother, to whose distant gravity such courtesy seemed appropriate—sometimes his aunt, to whom he had always, till lately, been sincerely attached; but never had he treated herself, nor, while she knew their ways, Meta, with this graceful ceremony. Was it natural, she asked herself for a moment, that the nearer relation should render him more reserved; was it possible, as she had wondered once or twice before, that the caress frankly given to the cousin who had been almost a sister should seem too familiar for the betrothed? Perhaps; she had never seen an engaged pair of her own rank; but surely such should not, would not have been a lover's first kiss when first alone with his bride? No: she felt that it would have seemed kindlier, more hopeful, if her hand had been merely detained for a few seconds with the half-absent familiar frankness of old.

“It is a strange and painful commencement, Ivy; I will not call it ill-omened, for you have real sorrows in the past, real troubles to endure in the present and the future, that need no

aggravation from superstitious fears or fancies. Only—never suppose that I do not know and feel how hard your part is—how cruelly you are tried. You know why: and I dare say your mother judged rightly for you—I hope so, I know *you* thought only of doing your duty, and much more than your duty, to me. Only do remember that it was not I who called upon you to leave home to-day. I never intended to hold you to any promise you could wish to forget.”

“Ethert, why will you say such things? Indeed you shall not find your wife more troublesome, more in the way, than the cousin you never wearied of, never were impatient with. At all events, do believe that I am content; I only wish to keep all my promises to you, to make things as little unpleasant for you as I can, if I cannot please you. The most cruel thing you could have done would have been to leave me—to show that you did not want me.”

“Not that, not that, Ivy! I felt I had no right—it was too hard upon you,” he replied, in a tone whose mingled resentment, compassion, and remorse she failed to distinguish.

“But—I suppose it had to be—only remember, I never wish you to give up your own wishes or feelings to mine, unless I tell you it is necessary; and I will do my utmost to render your life endurable. My leisure shall be at your command, and yours you will employ as you please:—you would never wish to do what I should be forced to object to as unsafe or unbecoming.”

Ivy's heart sank for a moment, more oppressed perhaps by what she did not than by what she did understand. Ethert assumed that her unhappiness would be well nigh intolerable; but from the first Ethert had seemed, if not to pity her over much, yet to pity her amiss. If he did not love her, he certainly would not ill-use or neglect her; and if without his love she must be unhappy, she would rather be unhappy with him than elsewhere. But the persistent, the absolute conviction of coming evil in his tone more or less dismayed her. She perceived that he distrusted the future as he resented the past. Fortunately for both, she sought no explanation, desired no insight into the mysteries of a

spirit evidently full of bitterness that she only wished to soothe and soften.

She was conscious of one earnest resolve ; to fulfil to the uttermost every word of her marriage vows ; to repay Ethert's sacrifice, to atone for her one irreparable fault, by a more absolute conjugal loyalty, by stricter obedience, more patient endurance, more vigilant if not warmer love, than he could have expected from the wife of his free choice—to reconcile him, or pray God to release him. Of no other release could she dream. She shrank instinctively from hints that seemed to question her faith or her endurance ; to suggest some possible treason to her inviolable obligation. She could not answer, could not discuss them ; best now and ever to leave them obscure, unheard, unheeded. In this single-hearted resolve was her strength ; in this wise and gentle silence her safety under long and bitter trial. Her voice was sweet and kind as ever, if it trembled a little.

“Your work is quite hard enough without increasing your fatigue on my account. All I ask is that you will let me try to be of use, of

comfort to you, as I ought. Of course you want your leisure hours to be hours of rest. Please do not fancy that I could bear to tire you more; that I will ask you to take me out when you would rather be quiet at home, or that I shall think it hard, sulk, or be pettish because you don't propose it—if only you will let me help to make your home comfortable.”

Ethert was both surprised and touched. He was assured that Ivy knew—she must know, even if she had not been told—what an empty falsehood were their marriage-vows; he had done and said little to soften the harshness of that cruel knowledge; yet from the first she had only shown herself anxious to do a wife's part with absolute loyalty; she had given up without a murmur the home he would not share, and now thought only of cheering the dreary life, of sweetening and lightening the toil, in which he persevered chiefly that he might not even seem to accept a favour from her hand.

“I cannot imagine you sullen or pettish, Ivy, even under sore provocation. If you were, I have learnt to smile—well, it would not be kind

to say at sulkiness, but—at humours more wayward than yours have ever been. But I am sorry and afraid for you. You do not, cannot know how dreary is the life before you, even if it were undertaken out of Well, I can only say, not that I shall not complain—I could never do that—but that I shall not be surprised if, after a single week's experience, you insist on returning home."

"Then, Ethert, Glynnehurst is home still?" Ivy said, turning aside a sentence full of peril and provocation with a tact born of absolute simplicity, a perfect sweetness of temper, by which Ethert was simply astounded. "I hope you will let it always be so. If we can only spend one month in twelve there, you will call, you will feel that 'going home?'"

He wondered whether she had understood the thought she so gracefully evaded, the suggestion she had so completely inverted; but whether or not, he could not but admire the exquisite taste and true feeling of the reply by which the young wife had identified the interests he had meant to dis sever, and intertwined them

with the home which, in calling it hers, he had so clearly renounced for himself. There was more than pity and regret on her account—a shame-faced look of penitence and discomfort on his own part—as he introduced her to the abode that was to be its substitute. He could not silence the sting of self-reproach as he compared the two. True, he had neither asked nor wished Ivy to exchange Glynnehurst for Victoria Street; but he had so placed her that conjugal loyalty left her no alternative but to share the dwelling he would not give up, or tacitly renounce, for an indefinite time, her position and her duty as a wife.

“Poor child!” he thought, as he led her in silence up the stairs to the *entresol* that was occupied by his chambers, “she won’t bear it long. After all, a year, long as it seems when the end is not plainly visible, soon passes even at seventeen; and less than twelve months will probably see her sole mistress of her father’s home, with only the ring to remind her that her marriage was more than an ugly dream.”

He was genuinely sorry that her reception was even more gloomy, more devoid of bridal cheer-

fulness, than had been her departure from home. The servants were of course in mourning; and the sudden sight of their sombre raiment sent a thrill of painful apprehension—the strange feeling inspired by what we call an evil omen—to Ivy's heart. They were hardly less shocked by the first appearance of the young bride in her heavy crape dress and dense black veil. Five years later, black may suit Ivy's peculiar beauty well; as yet, it gave to the slight form and girlish face a look of absolute childhood befitting thirteen rather than seventeen years, and had all the especially sad and incongruous effect that attaches to the deep mourning of a child. There was everything in the *entourage* to depress Ivy, and nothing to cheer her. Ethert had not intended this: had he contemplated the presence of his bride on his return to his chambers, he would have taken pains to give them such brightness as flowers and colours could afford, and to provide obvious occupation for her too ample leisure. From first to last, he would have done anything to please and comfort—not the wife, but the favourite cousin. But he had never so made up his mind to the future as to prepare for it.

Till they stood at the improvised altar, he had clung to the hope that some chance would postpone or prevent the marriage. Till this morning he had refused to assure himself that Ivy would really leave her home with him—she would at last be stung into revolt, would give way to some explosion of natural displeasure, would shrink from trusting herself to one who did not affect to love her. The one thing he had never anticipated was that simple silent fulfilment of the unwilling compact, which, with a nature like Ivy's, under the guidance of her own principles and her mother's self-conscious interest, was really matter of course; hardly to be prevented by any means short of such actual repudiation on his side as must absolve her, or such discovery of the motives of the marriage as would have driven her to consider release a debt of honour to him. So he had drifted from one point to another along the regularly indicated course, without ever clearly considering how he meant to act; conscious of, perhaps relying on, only two distinct convictions—his own intense and increasing aversion to each successive step

that bound the chain more firmly round him, Ivy's silent and dutifully repressed but surely equal repugnance and disgust.

"I am very sorry," he said, with genuine feeling, as they stood in the dull-looking parlour that served as drawing-room and library. "I had never intended that you should come to these rooms. It is not for long; but at least you shall have books—those are all political or professional—and a piano; we will see to that to-morrow. And you shall have a carriage, of course; unless you prefer to hire a brougham by the week till we can find a house and settle the establishment to your liking. But you will have tea now; and afterwards—would you care to pay a visit to Covent Garden—the market, not the theatre? We can get flowers there, which, arranged as you know how, will brighten these rooms a little; make them less like the *Courier* Office, if not more like home."

A few weeks ago, Ivy might have been more impressed by the unhomelike, dingy appearance of the bachelor dwelling, and less alive to, less comforted by Ethert's sympathy; if only because she would have taken that

sympathy for granted. Now, Ethert's feeling was the one paramount consideration; the question in which all her interest centred, which she strove in vain to answer, while deeply, painfully conscious that her peace or wretchedness depended on its solution. The darkest office-den would have been preferable to the brightest home, if its gloom elicited such proof of his kindness and concern. He was really troubled, really felt and showed compassion for the young girl he had brought from the surroundings of Paradise to those of Purgatory; and the kindlier tone and look, the earnest seeking to cheer and comfort her, would have reconciled Ivy to Limbo, if not to the Inferno itself.

“I should like Covent Garden very much, Ethert, if——. No, thank you, I am not tired at all; but I must not tire you, unless.... I mean, if you have your work to begin afterwards.”

Ethert started, and stood for a few moments in visible confusion and dismay.

“It is too bad, Ivy. When I told Lestrangle that I should return this evening, I did not

mean that you should return with me; and afterwards I forgot to withdraw my promise. I hope—at any rate I will ring for tea, and take you to Covent Garden afterwards, before I go down to the office. Do not, pray do not think that I intended this, Ivy; it would have been an unpardonable discourtesy.”

It was on other occasions unfortunate for himself, perhaps for her, that Ethert could not look a lie, if he were forced to speak one. But now the discomfiture and confusion he felt were too evident for distrust, even had Ivy been less thoroughly trustful and unsuspecting.

“Don’t apologize in that way, Ethert,” she said, kindly, as he opened the door of the sitting-room, and pointed out to her that of her own chamber. “Of course your work is the first thing, and I knew you could not afford a holiday just now.”

He could not but repeat his excuses when she returned, her dress arranged with all its usual indoor neatness, yet so that she might be promptly ready for the proposed excursion. But she gently interrupted him.

“I know you could not mean to treat me unkindly. Of course I am sorry we cannot spend our first evening together. But I could not expect to have your company as in your holidays at Glynnehurst. I hope you will take one when you can, and take me with you; and meantime do you think I am not content to be the companion of your working days, if only you would let me help to make your leisure a little more cheerful? Of course I know a wife cannot expect to have a man’s first attention, to have things put aside for her, as you used....”

She could not go on. She wished to express the feeling of a contented and loving wife, satisfied to share her husband’s home, and looking on his work, not as a rival, but as in itself the truest of all attentions to her. But the happiest bride could hardly give free utterance to her affection unless her shyness were encouraged, her faltering sentences filled in and completed, by her husband’s caressing look and touch, if not by words of fondness; and Ethert did not seem even to understand her.

“You think that marriage dispenses with politeness,” he said, with a somewhat forced smile. “I am sorry that I seem to have given some countenance to a common error. Ah! you are startled; you have forgotten the London postman’s knock.”

“No,” Ivy replied, pleasantly, striving to conceal her disappointment as she found her effort so ill-appreciated; glancing at the brown envelope brought in on a worn and shabby tray:—“it is a telegram, not a letter. What is the matter?” for Ethert’s countenance betrayed something like consternation as he perused the message. “Is it bad news, Ethert?”

“You are not used to London ways yet. A telegram at Glynnehurst was generally of some importance; here it only means a letter that has no time to lose. My instructions generally come by telegraph. Read this, and say if you can forgive me for having received it to-day.”

She complied somewhat reluctantly, and read the words aloud.

“‘African debate very important—watch it closely. Division will be wired about two; be

here by twelve-thirty.’ I don’t understand it at all, Ethert.”

“I am ashamed to explain how ill I shall have to use you. Well—if you have finished, will you still care to go to Covent Garden, when I tell you what this telegram really does mean?”

“How can you ask, Ethert? No; you shall not tell me till we have started, and if you find me child enough to be cross about it,” she added, playfully, “you shall bring me home and leave me at once.”

Utterly unused to London, save on the occasions above mentioned, and even then unused to walk in the street, the crowd and noise frightened and bewildered Ivy. But Ethert noticed, not without self-reproach, that she did not, as had been her wont, cling at once and of course to the arm that had so generally supported her when and where assistance was much less needed. He was half afraid that the offer might have been refused, and was touched by the simple, cheerful sweetness of the look that thanked him for it. But they had reached the open grassy square between the Abbey and the Palace

of Westminster before he had found courage to explain to her the meaning of the telegram. Then as she asked, "Is not that Westminster Hall; and where are the Houses?" the word recalled the matter to her mind.

"Are you to go to the House of Commons this evening, then?" she asked timidly.

"It is too bad, Ivy, but I must. And that is not all. I shall not get back for many hours."

"Oh, Ethert!" she exclaimed, involuntarily betraying her pain and surprise.

"I don't wonder you are angry, Ivy; and I have nothing to say for myself, if you chose to go back to Glynnehurst at once."

"Ethert, it is not your fault—only I am very, very sorry."

Her perfect frankness, her utter simplicity, embarrassed and added to Ethert's self-reproach as no taunt, no sullenness, no complaint, however well merited, could possibly have done.

"It is my fault in great measure, Ivy. So far as there is fault it is mine entirely. If Lestrangle had thought you would be with me, he

would never have dreamed of sending me such a summons this evening.”

“That is not reasonable, Ethert. I know you must attend to your duties first; I could not expect him to think of me so long as you must continue that work. I must not ask you again to give it up; only—when will you get back?”

“I don’t suppose they will divide before two, and I shall not . . . I cannot possibly get home for an hour after that,” he answered, very reluctantly.

This time Ivy was able to suppress the natural exclamation of indignation or mortified surprise; but by a momentary impulse she drew her hand from his arm. It was replaced, however, in less than half a minute, not because the crowd in the Strand scared as they jostled her, but because it was not in Ivy’s nature to resent anything short of obviously intentional affront by the slightest act of coldness or discourtesy. A minute or two had elapsed, however, before Ethert found courage to say:

“The debate between eight and ten is seldom important, and now you are there—I used to

dine in the gallery at that hour, we have a refreshment room of our own—Ivy, may I dare to come home at that time for an hour?”

“Ethert, what words you do use! If you can, if you will—can you always come home then?—and then we might have our dinner together, at least.”

The cost of flowers that at home had seemed to cost nothing startled Ivy; and, little as she knew of the value of money, she could not help remonstrating at the outlay by which in truth Ethert was endeavouring to make some little reparation, whether to her or to his own conscience, for a neglect which if not actually intentional ought to have been avoided—a call upon his time which was not so unwelcome as he could not but tell himself it should have been.

He could not wait to watch the pains with which she watered and arranged the collection of brilliantly coloured plants wherewith he had filled the cab in which they returned. It was with a nervous feeling of distrust and uneasiness, as if during the interval she must have

repented of her pardon, that, soon after eight that evening, Ethert re-entered his chambers. But Ivy's smile of welcome was as ready as the meal she had taken pains to have prepared exactly for the moment of his arrival; her manner displayed as much anxiety to render his brief stay pleasant as the pains she had taken with every detail of the arrangement of rooms, now very much brighter and pleasanter than had seemed possible a few hours before. The dinner over:—

“Must you go back now?” she said, as he rose. “I thought you said till ten, and it is only ten minutes' walk, is it? Oh, I understand! Of course, after so long and tiring a confinement, I know you want your cigar more than your dinner. But, Ethert, you would not go out for that?”

“I did want it, I confess, Ivy, badly. But the penance serves me right; it would be inexcusable to leave you a minute sooner on that account.”

“Why should you?” she answered simply. “I knew Mamma had put a box of those Regalias among our luggage. See, I have

found and put them ready for you. Now, you will light one here, will you not?"

How few weeks had passed, as he could not but remember, since, when courtesy or her own playful remarks had caused him to lay aside one of the same favourite cigars, his cousin had herself thrust the abandoned weed between his lips! It had been her wont at that time, whenever within doors or without she had been permitted to remain with her brother and himself while indulging in the habitual solace, herself to select Ethert's cigar, carefully choosing one free from damp and defect, and of the exact hue he fancied as indicating the most perfect condition. Often she had cut off the end before giving it; always she had lighted the match or spill, and held it at a convenient distance till the weed was fully ignited. There was no sign of resentment, coolness, or even formality in her altered manner. It seemed rather as if shyness and a doubt of her probable reception restrained the old familiar playfulness; prompted her to hand the box for his own choice, and place the strip of cedar, which even now she carefully lighted, in his hand.

"No, I will not smoke here, Ivy. The rooms are small enough at best, and the place would soon be even more unpleasant to you than fumes of tobacco, the ghosts of past cigars still haunting it, must make it even now; though I believe Edwards and his wife have taken some pains to purify it in expectation of your arrival."

"Have you not observed the white curtains," she said, "which I have put up since we came? That change disposes of whatever smell there was; and, Ethert, you cannot suppose that because I am here I could bear you to give up your own habits, to go without the indulgence you have enjoyed here as a matter of course. Is it because of what I did not say, but you seemed to think I meant—that men are not polite to their wives? What did you say of 'the courtesy that scorches like frozen steel?' Don't you know that nothing, not even rudeness, could sting like these little ceremonious unkindnesses? What do you want to hurt me for, Ethert?" her voice quivering, her eyes filling with tear. "What have I done? If you can't forgive me for being your wife, can't you forget it? Surely I am still

the cousin you liked too well to treat even so formally as Meta; can't you let me be the same still?"

"Only too gladly, dear little cousin," he answered eagerly, touched by the pain he had inflicted in mere perverse temper, and but half-conscious that he spoke his mind aloud. Then, startled by his own words and by her evident surprise, he changed his tone, tempted for once to an inconsistency of which he was half ashamed even at the moment. "But—behave as my cousin used to do; give me the cigar as you did before—thanks, cousin; and once more, thanks for your indulgence in a matter in which, as I always feel, men are less than courteous to women, and ladies more considerate than considered."

The table finally cleared, the gas lighted, the lace curtains drawn completely across the window, an arrangement by which, as Ethert felt, Ivy added greatly to the prettiness and apparent privacy of the apartment, she left the room for a moment; and returned carrying from the other sitting-room a small low rocking-chair, which had always seemed to Ethert signally

incongruous with the rest of the furniture.

“This was my own,” she said, “when I was here,” as he sprang up to take it from her. “No, Ethert, do remember it is my place now to wait on you when you come home. Here by the fire-place,” she said, leading him to place the chair she still held, so that as he resumed his own place she sat almost at his feet, and could look up freely into his face; the light falling upon her own, somewhat wistful, a little sad, and perhaps somewhat anxious and perplexed. But she was true to the proffer so unconsciously made; no word or look reminded him that his favourite cousin felt she had cause of complaint; she was perforce a little quiet, but not in the slightest degree cold or sullen—evidently wishing only to render the brief interruption of his labours as cheerful and unconstrained as possible: till he was unpleasantly startled by the sound from the great clock that announced the last quarter before ten. He had not thought that now, in Ivy’s company, the time could pass so pleasantly, so very much as it had done when six or twelve months before the cousins

might have been similarly for a short time alone together.

“Good night—it must be good night, Ivy, for you must not attempt to keep my hours. If you will close the double doors, I think I can promise you shall hear no sound to break your rest.”

If she felt pain, there was now no look of reproach or remonstrance, no glance that appealed for more or tenderer courtesy of adieu than was proffered. She parted from him with nothing of resentful coldness, seeming as if resolved simply to accept his mood, to obey his wish and make their intercourse as comfortable to him as he himself would permit. For once, therefore, if her image haunted him persistently, as it had often done since the possibility of marriage with her had first been forced upon his consideration, it was not altogether an object of repugnance. For once he did not turn as he had hitherto done impatiently to any other image that fancy could call up, to banish that which legitimately claimed his thoughts; and it may be that his mind wandered more than once to the chambers

where her presence was so little welcome as it had never done before; till the exciting and impassioned debate absorbed, as is always the case, all the attention of an eagerly and deeply interested politician.

CHAPTER VII.

UNA DE MULTIS.

“WELL, Ivy, that exhausts my list. Is there any of these that will suit you, or must we make further enquiry?”

“Any of them would do of course, Ethert, that you think we can afford; and some of them I like quite as well as I suppose I should ever like a furnished and a London house.”

“Well, then, will you choose, or must we go back over those you think most suitable?”

“Don’t try to make me choose, Ethert. It was the same with the carriage; you have not given me any help—no, that is not true, you have helped me all you could, have done everything in taking trouble and telling me what would not do; but you have never told

me, never let me guess what you like. And yet you know, Ethert, the less I can do to please you the more I wish to do what I can."

The remonstrance was in this particular instance a little out of place; and Ethert, conscious how persistent, how patient had been Ivy's efforts to find something in which she could gratify his wishes, how resolutely they had been defeated, was glad on this one point to feel himself in the right.

"Ivy, these are all matters that concern you, and you almost alone. It would be very unfair if I were to bias your choice, and I see already that if I did express a preference you would not like to set it aside."

"Well, then, you might tell me what you think would suit me best; you know so much more about it, and I know nothing except what rooms look pretty and clean."

"I think then, Ivy, you will not like any of those in regular streets. Nor is Bloomsbury, I fancy, more to your taste than my own, while all we have seen at the West End are somewhat expensive. The rent of the little house near

St. James's Park is no doubt as high in proportion, but it will not cost so much perhaps in the end as many of lower rent but greater size; and the out-look is pretty, especially from your drawing-room and bed-room."

"But, Ethert, I have been thinking—why should we take a house at all? Why not be content with your chambers? If they would do for Papa all the time he was in London,—and Mamma spent half of one session there when he was ill and she could scarcely go out—they might do for us; I am sure I should be content."

"I should not be content for you. Well, make your choice. Does that one seem to your mind? Well, then, let us go back there and you can arrange exactly what you will do, and plan your household on the spot."

"But, indeed, you must please do that for me. You know I cannot tell what anything costs; and surely that is always a husband's part. It is for you to say what I may spend on each thing, and what for myself."

“That last item at any rate, I distinctly decline to settle, or even to suggest. It is not for me to limit what I do not give; but I will, so far as I can, tell you what you can and cannot comfortably manage, especially I will guard you against the greatest of all mistakes to which young housekeepers are liable—forgetting what is called the margin. Arrange your house, your own expenses to cost two-thirds of what you mean to spend, and count that the other third will not more than provide for things you have forgotten or that occur unforeseen. I shall get rid of the rooms very promptly. The demand for chambers in that situation is great among Parliamentary officials, counsel, and members; and if you like to keep Edwards and his wife, you could not have a better beginning of a household—and she will take, I doubt not, very much trouble off your hands, and save you from very much cheating.”

Perhaps no young wife ever submitted so cheerfully to the disappointment of her natural expectations, accepted with such unaffected willingness a smaller *menage*, a much lower

rate of expenditure than that to which she had been accustomed and might naturally have looked forward. The more conscious Ivy was that this necessity was entirely of Ethert's creation, the more distinctly she understood what he had frankly explained, that at Glynnehurst their income would have been ample for all reasonable wishes, the more careful was she never to remind him directly or indirectly of the truth.

Her chief care in all arrangements, in all the discussions in which whether he would or not he could not but take part, was to suggest no expense which he might have to pronounce impracticable, to express no wish that he could have the pain of denying; and Ethert's own tastes being distinctly simple and unostentatious perhaps no young couple of means so much below the lady's home-standard ever began their married life with a more perfect freedom from pecuniary troubles or difficulties, a more ample margin for contingent needs or the fancies of the hour.

It gave him no little gratification to assent to, and it would have given him peculiar pain

to refuse on the ground of expense, any of Ivy's timid suggestions, or enquiries whether this or that little indulgence were altogether prudent.

That no purchase, no pleasure could give any material satisfaction to her was, however, only too plain. She accepted, not merely willingly, but with thankfulness in which something of an effort might be discerned, every pleasure that Ethert could propose; and he was ever anxious to afford her every one that his scanty leisure permitted them to share.

But without him Ivy would never go out; she would never accept an invitation where his work forbade him to attend her; and this determination, which nothing but a positive command such as he could not venture to utter would have overridden, confined her necessarily to the house on nearly every evening of the week, save the one for which, always free, he had invariably provided some form of amusement out of doors.

"I must ask your pardon, Ivy," he said one Saturday morning as, descending later than usual, he found her still seated before

the urn, painfully keeping warm and as comfortable as she could every article of a meal that had been originally prepared nearly an hour before. "I am shamefully late; but I was very tired, and this time I have overslept myself. Pardon me, I will try that it shall not happen again, if you will not consent to breakfast by yourself at a more reasonable hour."

"Please don't ask me to do that again; I can't, indeed—unless you say I must. Do you forget how very little I see of you, how little I can do? But I am afraid you think too much of that," she added, remorsefully; "that you make too great an effort always to come down, however tired you are, that you may not keep me waiting. This is the first time you have been unpunctual, and I cannot but doubt that I am terribly exacting when I remember how irregular my father was after work less hard than yours. Ethert, you are not well to-day . . . do give up the theatre to-night. We have not had one evening together at home, and I am sure you are not well enough to enjoy it."

“Do not you enjoy it, Ivy?” he said suddenly, looking at her keenly.

She was well-nigh taken by surprise, startled into an admission of the truth. She did enjoy very much an amusement of which she had known very little till now. But with all its constraint and discomfort, one quiet day’s enjoyment of Ethert’s society would have, she felt, far greater charm for her; and his question, the present languor and weariness which he could not conceal, and the recollection that more than once he had had evident difficulty in keeping awake through what seemed to her a most interesting performance, gave her a glimpse of a fact she had never guessed before—that these Saturday evenings were sacrifices to her claims, not a pleasure to her husband.

“Ethert, I thought, since you made a point of spending your one free evening in the week in that way—I thought you enjoyed it; I forgot how dull, how poor these things would seem to a critic like yourself. If I had known it was for my sake, I should have begged you before now to stay at home when you

can. Now, do promise me; do stay this evening."

"I should only be too glad to indulge my own indolent mood, Ivy. But it is too hard on you, who have but this one night's pleasure in the seven."

"You speak so much of pleasure, Ethert, and you seem to think *that* must be a lady's idea of it. I have heard one or two ladies speak in the same way, as if the pleasures of their life were to be numbered by their parties or their visits to the Opera and the theatre and the like. I cannot understand it. According to that I had no pleasure at all in my life, except the little time that I was in London before before now; and I am sure home, and our visit to the Lakes, were far, far the pleasantest times I have ever had."

She checked herself and coloured, sorry she had almost avowed a painful but what must be a self-evident truth.

"Don't you know, Ivy," he said, smiling, "the saying of one of the cleverest, perhaps one of the wisest men of our own age, but one very little known and very much under-

rated, that 'life would be very tolerable but for its pleasures?'"

"Then, Ethert, you don't care to go out; you have done it for me, and you would as soon or sooner have stayed at home?"

This was not exactly true. If Ethert were something more than indifferent to the amusements of London life, yet, far more than the fatigue and tedium they involved, he dreaded the constraint of his home. He had not yet learned to trust in Ivy's tact and endurance for the avoidance of such painful scenes as the mere absence of all pretence of love might well provoke. And, feeling that this was perhaps his paramount motive—though he would have considered every possible indulgence that could be afforded her as a simple debt to Ivy—he could not take credit for the unselfishness she ascribed to him,

"Don't look too closely into motives, Ivy. I must confess I don't enjoy the theatre as you do; but do not be offended if I say I am sadly afraid that nothing else would keep me awake on a Saturday evening; and I could not forgive myself the rudeness

of dozing through an evening alone with you."

It might seem that a bride so considerate as Ivy—the more bent on proving her affection that it was so persistently ignored, the more dutiful that nothing seemed to be expected, that very little was accepted from her—should have understood in such a confession much more than it was meant to convey. It was not for want of thought, hardly even for want of experience in Ethert's ways and character that she failed to realize its full meaning. But she had seen nothing of the working world, nothing above all of the life of brain-work. She had lived exclusively among those who are born to eat the bread, and not to earn it. She believed certainly that Ethert was, must be, overworked; she was most anxious to spare him, most earnestly wished to persuade him to abandon labours she knew to be severe and trying. But she had no practical idea what over-work of brain means, no notion of the symptoms that betray it, so unlike those of physical fatigue. Above all she knew nothing of the peculiar and perilous connection between excess of mental

labour and insufficiency of sleep—the way that each re-acts to aggravate the other.

She had long realized that he seemed always tired, that neither in spirit nor in bodily strength was he what he had been six or even three months before ; but she supposed that London life could not be wholesome, that a man engaged for eight or ten hours at a desk, or in the far more trying atmosphere of the House, especially by night, could not enjoy the health and energy he had preserved amid the Cumbrian mountains, or in the free air, the outdoor work and sport, the quiet pleasant indolence in which his holidays at Glynnehurst had been spent.

It troubled, but did not alarm her as yet, to find that Ethert was so drowsy on every holiday evening, so languid morning after morning ; nor could she guess how much of the irritability he could repress, but not conceal, was due to the combination of two trials, either of which may be endured alone, but both of which at once no brain has ever long endured—exhausting mental work abroad with harassing restless heart-ache at home.

Before they had risen from table the second post brought a letter for Ethert, from which—she thought with some little embarrassment—he took a small enclosure for Ivy.

“From Meta!” she said eagerly. “Ah! that is kind of her; I did not fancy she would write so soon. I wrote to her: I hope I was not wrong, Ethert. It was in the evening, and I meant to ask you before I sent it; but leaving it on your desk it was posted with yours before you came down, and—I forgot, or—perhaps I was afraid—I am sorry, Ethert, I ought to have told you at once.”

“Why, Ivy? It was no business of mine. But it was kind and thoughtful of you to remember Meta; and naturally she must be pleased and flattered by your attention.”

The tone of somewhat exaggerated, elaborate deference, by which she had been more than once reminded that the Lady of Glynnehurst was no longer the young cousin whom Ethert had treated with less ceremony than Meta herself, was another of those changes that Ivy could least understand; so much easier was it to comprehend and make allowance for the direct effects of re-

sentment and mortification than to interpret their manner of working by contradiction in a mind like Ethert's. Like all the ceremonious formality that marked estrangement and distance, this tone of careful respect grieved her not a little, but it hardly admitted of deprecation or remonstrance. She turned to the note :

“What can she mean?—‘I hope I shall see something of you, though I know it can only be a little, if Mrs. Glynne allows me to accompany her, as I think now she will.’ You told me your mother was ill, and I had fancied she could not leave home. What is it, Ethert? Does she mean to go abroad, and will she pass through London?”

Ivy paused, for as she turned to him for explanation the expression of his face perplexed her. She read there not merely pain and anxiety, but mixed with these an embarrassment, almost amounting to distress, that she could not interpret. It no longer seemed strange that he avoided to look at her; he generally shrank from meeting eyes whose saddened expression conveyed a silent reproach all the more felt because unintentional, whose appeal or enquiry he could no longer

answer with the frank affectionate kindness of former days; but it was a new and strange thing that he found so much difficulty in speaking.

“Is she worse? Oh, Ethert, I am so sorry!”

The words were spoken in a pleading tone, as if she entreated leave to share and comfort his sorrow, her eyes moist with the earnest sympathy she dared not more directly offer. Her experience of his temper was confined to its happiest and its bitterest moods; she could not but be hurt and frightened as, at a moment when most would have been especially open to sympathy, Ethert's countenance set in its sternest expression, and his voice took the cold, low, measured tone she had learnt to connect with strong feeling sharply repressed. It was one of her most frequently recurring troubles that his resolution never to express displeasure left her to fancy it in every change of his face. She knew neither how she could have offended, nor what, unless it were some unconscious offence of hers, could have given that manifest hardness to look and manner.

“Forgive me that I cannot show you my mother’s letter. She is ill; how ill I do not know, but—I fear. Meta and I have persuaded her to consult the only doctor who can do her good—if anything can do that now.”

She had begun to apprehend or to feel how much suppressed pain and intense anxiety were concealed under the few careful words and hard accent; and was almost startled by the utter change of tone when—turning as it were from a matter concerning himself only to that which touched her—he continued:—

“So I suppose you may see Meta next week, if you wish it. My mother speaks of reaching town on Wednesday or Thursday.”

“If I wish it?—Surely—Ethert, of course they will come to us? She could not refuse you that, especially if she is ill; or”—as a new and most painful thought crossed her—“it is on my account that... Is it that she will not come to me?”

She could not control the trembling of voice and hand, the quivering lip, the unbidden tears that filled and all but overflowed her eyes: and

once more Ethert dreaded that the outbreak he had ever since their marriage expected, and so anxiously avoided, must come at last.

“My mother would not dream of so wounding *you*, so slighting *me*,” he answered; and Ivy could not help wondering at the peculiar emphasis on the pronouns that seemed so exactly misplaced. “If you think fit to ask her, of course she would accept; but you hardly know how much you would be undertaking, what a burden in so small a household is the care of an invalid so helpless as ... I fear she is now.”

“Ethert, you don’t, you cannot mean that you would not—no, I know you love your mother; and it is our duty, of course. What do you mean?”

“Is it *your* duty, Ivy? At any rate I could not ask you...”

“Ask—for your mother!—is it my duty?” she repeated, at first simply bewildered. “Ah!” interrupting herself, in a tone of profound sadness, “I understand now—It is always the same, always ‘you,’ ‘yours,’ never ‘ours,’ even when you speak of our home... Have you break-

fasted? Then will you ring, and excuse me?"

Her face was averted, and a desperate effort at self-command so controlled her voice that Ethert did not perceive the cause of her hasty retreat, till some twenty minutes afterwards she returned; when all her care failed to conceal the traces of bitter weeping, and scarcely availed to restrain the utterance of passionate feeling, the impulses of a spirit wounded to the quick, as she asked in a low tone:—

"May I write at once, then, and ask your mother and Meta to come to us and stay with us as long as they can remain in town? Ethert, I had no idea I had so behaved that you could doubt——"

"Thank you, Ivy. It is very kind of you, and I am only sorry to put such a burden upon you."

"Ethert! you ... I understand you less and less every day. I know you would do all you could for your mother. I know how fond you are of Meta; and ... I did not think you could doubt that I should wish to do my best, that

I should grudge any trouble for your mother, any more than for my own."

"No, Ivy! I could hardly doubt that you would always wish to do, to be all that is best and kindest. But...at any rate it was for you to offer; I have no right to expect anything from you for me or mine. And—will you choose to have Meta here? It is not necessary now; though, if you had not asked her to come to you, I could not have allowed my mother to be alone. But I am afraid Meta cannot take much trouble off your hands."

"Has Meta done anything to displease you, Ethert? I cannot understand at all. Surely you wish to see her?—And it would seem so strange, so unkind to leave her out. May I not ask her?"

"Whatever you can do for either of them, Ivy, is the greatest kindness you can render me. Thanks—you have taken no little trouble off my mind, but I am afraid you are taking more on yourself than you know."

"Please say no more of that, Ethert. I cannot bear to hear you speak as if —Surely, either you think me utterly heartless, alto-

gether selfish and undutiful, or you forget that you are speaking in your own home, and to your wife? As for Meta—if you are willing, you know it will be a great pleasure to me to have her here—the only girl-friend I ever had. Surely you know how fond we were of each other—if I was silly enough to be mortified sometimes when I found how much more she knew, when she wondered that I could not understand what was plain to her. Then I may ask her too?”

“Will you read my letter?” she said, some half hour later. “Please see that it is all it should be. You know I was always a little afraid of my aunt; and she is so accomplished, so accurate herself, I should not like her to be ashamed of me now.”

“I am quite sure, Ivy, your letter will be what I could not improve. No, I had rather not read it; it should be all your own. But once more, thank you.”

Ivy felt that angry reproof or bitter irony could hardly have stung so keenly as these reiterated expressions of a gratitude evidently in its way sincere—certainly not meant to wound.

She could understand by this time the perverse pedantic consistency that refused at any point to identify his right or interest with hers, refused even to assume the master in the home maintained at her expense. Such persistent, deliberate, pointed manifestation of estrangement not only hurt her bitterly, but made it difficult at times not to despise what looked like sheer feminine petulance in the man she had pledged herself to honour. But she never fathomed, never even perceived or guessed the deeper feeling that, beneath all superficial irritation, lay at the root of everything that seemed most unkind and unnatural in his conduct and attitude. Resolved to treat all his references to the compulsion they had both suffered as mere ebullitions of bitterness, mere outcries of mental pain, she had, fortunately perhaps for both, missed the clue that these would have afforded to his thought. She never asked herself even what meant the phrase most frequently repeated, "I cannot take all where I give nothing." She never realized that Ethert—utterly contemptuous of his aunt's hints, and imputing her own deprecatory answers at first, her timid though persevering efforts to

please ever since, to native kindliness and a sense of duty that forbade her to speak a truth apparently undutiful—regarded her assent to their marriage as no less extorted than his own; extorted by fear of consequences, as his had been by chivalric pity and by his natural shrinking from the only alternative.

It never occurred to her that he took for granted, not only her original unwillingness, but her present and permanent however carefully suppressed longing for release; that he was prepared for a total separation when they should have been long enough together to throw curiosity off the scent as to the cause of the rupture.

Her only thought was to do all he would permit for him, to endure in silence all he gave her to bear—to make his home comfortable, her presence therein endurable to him while his resentment should continue; hoping, with frequent intervals of despair, but hoping on the whole with a confidence whose source she could hardly have explained, that her absolute devotion, her quiet, silent, loyal submission must at last win back the old affectionate tenderness; she

hardly hoped for more, or would have understood why that should no longer suffice for her happiness.

To leave him, under any provocation, was the last idea she could have entertained. Deal with her as he would, she was his wife: however he might practically set it aside, she herself would never forego her claim but with her life. So deep was their contradiction of thought and feeling, so profoundly did the cross purposes perceptible enough upon the surface penetrate and pervade their whole relation.

Called away for a while by household duties, she found on her return that Ethert had for once abandoned the effort to conceal his exhaustion and suffering, and thrown himself on the sofa; too prostrate with pain and weakness to rise, as he would punctiliously have done at another time, on her approach. Her timid endeavours to find some means of relief, to render the little kindly offices and soothing services of household affection, were received in a manner and spirit that greatly pleased and comforted her, so easily was she influenced, affected by every sign of feeling, kindly or unkind, on his part. Any one

else Ethert would have dismissed, gratefully but decisively. In pain, and especially in depression such as pain had now brought on, he always preferred to be alone; and Ivy's ministrations were of course doubly unwelcome. But her patient endurance, her persevering loyalty, had so touched his heart, so appealed to his conscience, so perchance recalled still cherished memories of a pleasanter past, that he could not bear again to repulse or mortify her.

True, he ascribed her attentions only to a strong sense of conjugal duty, or to that native feminine tenderness which could not leave physical suffering untended or unpitied. That they could be the spontaneous impulses of simple natural affection he did not dream; but he responded to them with less of formal courtesy, with something much more like the habitual kindness and sympathy of old, than he had ever shown since their betrothal; and this gave Ivy courage for an equally unwonted effort of frankness and confidence. Drawing near and placing herself, as she had never done since the first evening in his chambers, on a stool by

his feet, though unable now to look up steadily into his face, she spoke at last in a low hesitating tone.

“Ethert, of course I know you have made up your mind to punish me. I suppose you could see no other way; for if you could, you must feel that none could be so hard, that there was none I would not have chosen rather than this.”

“Punish you! What do you mean?” he interrupted. “Have I ever spoken a word of complaint or fault-finding? I take no credit for that, of course; you never gave me a chance, if I had wished to do so. But have I ever given you reason to think me displeased; have I ever denied a wish of yours, neglected your requests, or spent an hour elsewhere that I could give you?”

“Ethert, that is not worthy of you. Do you not know how deeply you have made me feel your displeasure, dissatisfaction? Yes; you *have* denied me everything I really wished or cared for. But I know what my fault is—too well; I know I must deserve it, or you would not do it. Only, however I may

deserve it, it does seem hard to be punished without seeing an end, to suffer without hope.

“I cannot help thinking how very differently you would treat a child if she had been ever so wicked — and I was a child such a little while ago. Then, whatever I had done, you could never bear that I should suffer one half hour of pain and shame; then if you had been forced to leave me in disgrace for a whole day, you would have been quite as sorry as I, you would have been so eager to forgive. Of course it is different now. But even the worst criminal is sentenced for so many months or years, and knows she will be released; and yet I dare not ask you how long, lest you should say you will *never* forgive the injury that I can never undo.

“But do not be angry: indeed I did not mean to complain, only to remind you of something you said yourself one day. Once when Meta was in disgrace, the only time I ever heard you contradict or differ

from your mother aloud, you said—do you remember—‘Household discipline should be kept to ourselves; it is too bad to shame her before strangers.’ Ethert, you will remember that, when they are here? For me, I have never spoken, written a word, never let even Mamma see or guess that I was not happy. And now . . . you will spare me before them?”

Such a plea, preferred in such a tone, so illustrated and enforced, touched Ethert to the quick. Had the request, the warning been needed, this implicit submission, this unresisting unquestioning humility would have been perfectly irresistible. Much more than that, they must have quelled his pride and won his heart at once and for ever—if he could have believed in their absolute sincerity. But—“truth is not always plausible.” That Ivy’s one thought was to accept with perfect loyalty her husband’s will; to accept her wrongs, whatever they might be, in the only light in which she could help acknowledging them in her own heart as wrongs—that she was resolute to recognize neither tyrannical caprice nor

wanton unkindness in anything Ethert chose to do—this was the literal truth ; but a truth which especially now, when feminine submission and conjugal obedience are so entirely antiquated and obsolete, might well seem incredible. Ethert felt that if Ivy regarded as a deliberate infliction the punctilious reserve which covered his instinctive revolt from the intolerable falsehood of their life, it must seem to her not even ruthless justice but cruel and most ungenerous revenge. She *must* mean the reproach she forbore to speak ; and so her gentle appeal, interpreted by the voice of his own conscience, stung him with all the venom of the bitterest irony.

“ You have a right to taunt me, Ivy, I must confess. Only, remember, if I have given you nothing I have claimed almost as little. But while we have to maintain appearances you are quite right—we should avoid all that can enlighten others ; and as you remind me, you have set a faultless example in that respect. I think you might have trusted me to follow it. I esteem and respect you far too highly to slight or affront you intentionally ; and if I fail in

consideration before others, my failure would grieve and shame me as much as it could wound you."

"Ethert, I am very sorry I spoke, if you take my words in that spirit. Child as I am, I only asked you to spare me at seventeen the humiliation you could not bear to see Meta suffer at eleven; and I would not have asked that but that I think, I *do* think you would wish to spare me, if you remembered. I dare say men don't see—but women would, and even a girl like Meta. Remember they, especially Meta, know what you were before—before you began to be afraid to be kind to me. She would see the change, and I hardly think you would wish them to know—to see me suffering and humbled."

"Ivy, no other woman, no other girl even so young as you, would dream of using such terms, or regarding things in that light. You may trust me to respect at least the name I have given you; to do and say nothing before others that could cause you pain or offence. But besides that, however much you must suffer in a marriage made for you without or against your

will, you cannot possibly believe that I wish to hurt, or, as you say, to punish you, where you were not in fault; and if I were so unjust and ungenerous, *you* could not feel humbled by my unkindness.

“I never pretended that I could give you more than the respect and consideration which would be due to your womanhood, even if you had not yourself so thoroughly deserved them. If I have failed in either, if I have given you cause to think that I could willingly slight you or treat you discourteously, the disgrace, the humiliation falls not on you but on myself. But indeed, Ivy, I did not know that I had ever been so wanting in loyalty or good breeding.”

“Ethert, your own words say all there is to say. What I asked you was not to show, before the quick eyes of a woman and a young girl who know you well, that, as you say, you can give me nothing but what you call respect. Surely they need not know that? It is true you have not failed—I wish you would. That—that care to treat me as a lady, to show in everything the same punctilious attention you would

pay to a guest, to a stranger, helps to make me realize more what you really feel, and to make your own feeling harder. I should have some hope but for that. Better, if I may be nothing else, to have been your slave, to have at least so much of a wife's position as to be spared all this ceremony and consideration, to be treated as something that did at any rate belong to you, that ought to be useful, that could not be a trouble and a fetter. But forgive me, Ethert, I know it is useless to complain, and I did not mean to do so—only, you *will* remember when they are here?"

CHAPTER VIII.

APPEARANCES.

“ I AM glad you are here earlier than usual,” said Lestrangle to me. “ I found out yesterday that Lady Glynne,—I mean of course our friend’s wife, not her mother—has been some weeks in town ; and I want you to accompany me, as I of course must call upon her, and you ought to do so. You know how strangely and suddenly she was married, poor child—beside what proved her father’s death-bed. Sir Charles was a good Tory, but I never heard that he had any other merit. I knew him pretty well as a politician : I have seen both his wife and his daughter, but when the latter (who can be even now little more) was quite a child ; a sweet, quiet, pretty child, but always seeming

cowed in his presence. I suppose her brother's death made the marriage convenient for family reasons. Now, I want to make her acquaintance: but we are pretty sure to find Glynne there. Take off his attention if you will, and let me have ten minutes' talk with her. Something is wrong with him: either his work is too much for him, or there is worry as well as work. If it goes on for many weeks longer I doubt he will break down, and that I cannot afford."

I was much touched and interested by the quiet, simple girlish courtesy with which the young bride, at first alone, received us; and there was something especially noteworthy, almost affecting, in the mixture of timidity, anxiety to please, and what seemed almost like a wish to appeal for some favour or consideration to her husband's chief.

Sir Ethert speedily joined us, and I fulfilled Lestrangle's injunction to the best of my ability by inviting his attention to one or two recently published works; for which,

as entrusted with the literary department of the *Courier*, it had been my business to find reviewers, and one of which I thought he might have undertaken. He never looked towards Lady Glynne, as many recently married men on such an occasion might have done; but I observed that his attention wandered once or twice, as if he wished not to seem to watch her, but at the same time to be ready to support or relieve her, should the conversation prove too much for the shyness of one little used to society.

Lestrangle, however, spoke to her in his gentlest, kindest manner; not so much that which I had seen him assume towards young and pretty women, whose attractions rendered the attention they claimed less troublesome or fatiguing than usual, as that I had once observed in his conversation with his own eldest, a girl then just emerging from the school-room; a union of gracious courtesy to the opening womanhood, with simple encouraging frankness, free from all assumption of patronage, towards one who had

not shaken off the timidity of childhood.

“I know,” he said after awhile, “I must represent to you, not exactly your husband’s evil genius, but the tyranny and hardship of his life. It is so hard that, sorely as I shall miss him, I shall not pretend to wonder, I hope ‘I shall not be selfish enough to regret when you persuade him to abandon it.”

“He seems too much attached to it,” she answered, something of sadness as well as of hesitation perceptible in her tone; “and I must not be selfish enough to fret or tease him about it. I suppose it is not much worse than was my father’s life in Parliament?”

“Very much worse, Lady Glynne: twice as hard for him at least, and infinitely more trying to you.”

“Mr. Lestrangle,” she said, and I caught a nervous look towards us (closely engaged as by this time we were in conversation, a conversation, in which I intentionally left the leading part to Glynne) as she somewhat

lowered her tone, always low and soft, "May I ask one thing? Is not . . . have you noticed whether Ethert is not . . . has not found his work very hard of late?"

"You mean," said Lestrangle, catching her meaning at once, imperfectly as it had been expressed, "whether he is not overworked or ill? Yes, I have noticed, and I am glad you can so far trust me as a friend. I have had a long experience of journalism, remember, and," he added, "you may remember too, or perhaps you do not know, I have"—and I who could not see his face caught the intense though suppressed pain in his tone—"a daughter a little older, I think, than you can be yet. Since a time some years before her birth, I have worked much as your husband and I are working now, and I think I could guess what he finds beyond his strength."

"Can you?" said Ivy eagerly. "Oh, I wish you would tell me." She checked herself at once, as if conscious of indiscretion; a consciousness of which Lestrangle was evidently anxious to relieve her.

“A man can work, Lady Glynne, while he can sleep. For some reason or other, perhaps only because he is not yet seasoned to our unnatural hours and exciting work, your husband probably suffers from sleeplessness or insufficient sleep. Now I shall ask no question, shall say no more. You have my guess and must deal with it as you can. Only, there is one saying which contains more falsehood and mischief than all the proverbs which, from the time of Solomon downwards, have compressed ignorance into epigram—that six hours of sleep is enough for a man, seven for a woman, and eight for a child or a fool. This last is about the least that will keep a journalist permanently in working condition. I have known scores who did with much less. I don’t remember one of them who has reached my own age—outside a lunatic asylum. Of course Glynne will hear what I have told you; but perhaps you will find my counsel of more use if you can have it followed before he knows who gave it.”

Sir Ethert accompanied us as we walked to the office, and I had no opportunity for

some time afterwards of asking Lestrangle the motive or result of his practical *tête-à-tête*. But that evening Ethert observed his wife busy for some little time with a pencil and a sheet of paper on which she seemed to have noted a very few figures that, considering their paucity, seemed to trouble her strangely.

“What harasses you, Ivy?” he said, not as in another might have seemed natural attempting to look unbidden at the work that engaged her. “You are not drawing, nor I think writing: are those household accounts that are too much for you? You know, if I can help you, I shall be only too glad to give any assistance that may not look like interference.”

She did not answer; her lip quivered, her eyes were so closely fixed upon the paper and she so shaded them with her hand that Ethert became aware that she was seriously troubled. It did not occur to him that his own words, rather than the matter in hand, whatever it was, were answerable for her distress.

“What is it, Ivy? If you have got into any difficulty, you cannot think...you cannot be afraid to trust me, to count on assistance from me without one word of fault-finding? One expects a young housekeeper, and especially one who has been left so much to her own guidance, to learn management by mistakes.”

“Ethert, will you promise not to be angry—I do not mean to scold but to be displeased—if I tell you what I have just been doing; what it is about?”

“I promise unhesitatingly, Ivy. I can hardly imagine anything you could do that, as things stand, would give me the right to be either surprised or displeased.”

“Ethert, I had rather...rather you beat me than speak like that! Can anything be worse than to be told that you will not express displeasure if you cannot help feeling it?”

“You remind me,” he answered with a forced smile, “of the old Russian story of the lady who cried over the indifference proved by her English husband’s abstinence from personal correction, and who found that, beginning

with the stick, he speedily ended with the poker."

"There might be worse things," she answered gravely, showing more clearly in tone and manner how keenly she was stung than she had ever done before. "I beg your pardon, Ethert; I know that is not the way to get you to consider kindly, to forgive what I wanted to say. But—do you know how much sleep you do get?"

"I should know:—what has put that into your head, Ivy?"

"Because I see what an effort it is to you to keep awake. You would fall asleep every afternoon, if you were not so determined to make me feel that you are more punctilious, more constrained with your wife than you ever were with your cousin, or, I should think, with your mother. But, forgive me, I know I ought not to have said that: only I don't see how you can get more than six hours' sleep any night but Saturday, and I am sure it is making you ill."

"I must make the best of it then, for it is all I can get," he answered wearily, but with

such quiet decision that Ivy, easily discouraged, did not then dare pursue the subject. She had tried in vain to win permission to adapt her hours to his own. With more reason than she was aware, that proposal had been silenced by the only peremptory injunction that had yet appealed to her promise of unreasoning obedience.

“Perhaps,” she thought, “his mother may see, may be able to persuade him.”

Had Ivy’s experience of domestic relations been somewhat wider, she would have perceived at once how very little was to be expected from maternal influence over a son of thirty, when she witnessed the meeting to which she had looked forward with many mingled feelings. The cold formal manner of her aunt, even with her only child, the sort of constrained respect which on Ethert’s part either concealed or took the place of filial affection, had more than once struck her painfully, even as a child. It seemed to her still more marked, still stranger, when for the first time her husband received his mother in his own house as the head of the family. A more experienced

observer might have known that where so much formality, so little ease existed there could be little or nothing of that kind of soothing insensible influence which alone women can exercise over men, or even youths once emancipated from actual authority.

On a matter of business within the range of her experience, on a point of practical prudence, the selection of a career, the amount of trust to be placed in a stranger, man or woman, Ethert would have thought no counsel likely to be much more sound and valuable than his mother's. To no one living would he have been so unwilling to turn for sympathy, or for that kind of advice wherein sympathy is an essential element. Where his own health or personal comfort were concerned, where a domestic problem involving feeling as well as policy had to be solved, in short wherever sentiment, even of the simplest, most universal kind, might come in, he would have turned for help or suggestion to his aunt, to Ivy herself, even to Meta, or, if that were possible, to a male friend like Lestrangle rather than to one who had never been able, perhaps had

never tried to pretend to feel with him on any subject; who was always the severest and least appreciative critic of his writings, who had done her best to curb—not so much by ridicule, as by hard practical analysis which annoyed and stung infinitely more than ridicule itself could have done—her son's romantic humour and mystical fancy.

The young wife was herself awed by the recollection partly of her aunt's stern gravity, partly of what had seemed to her almost more than severity towards Meta; but she could hardly understand how much the same influences had acted on Ethert's character, formed his manner and governed the tone of his feeling towards his mother. Ivy could not believe Ethert afraid of any one, if she could scarcely suppose that any one could be at ease with Aunt Flora. What took her more completely by surprise was the meeting between Ethert and Meta. That his Pearl had been the object of Ethert's strongest and deepest interest, that for years he had thought, cared, planned for her as he had occasion to do for no one else; that he had in his mother's phrase, petted and

spoilt her, no less than his cousin in the days when she was simply the object of manly tenderness to a childish favourite—Ivy had always known or assumed. That his marriage could make the slightest difference in his feelings, or that he could dream of concealing or repressing them for fear of offending or wounding her—that he could fancy her jealous of his regard for a child because it contrasted with his indifference, or more than indifference, to his wife—she could not conceive. That because he did not like the bride who had been forced upon him he should be less fond of, or more careful not to show fondness for, the orphan to whom she had never grudged his affection, was a thought that would never have entered her mind; one which it would have been difficult for her to understand if suggested by another. And Ethert sufficiently appreciated Ivy not to feel embarrassed by any apprehension of ungenerous or unworthy feeling on her part.

Such constraint as there was arose partly from the recollection of the hopes he had been compelled to abandon, partly from a

sense of what was due to Ivy—a sense the keener that she herself was so unlikely to assert her claims, or express resentment even should she feel it. But after all the constraint was far less than Ivy fancied.

Ethert had been especially anxious to receive Meta kindly and naturally—to betray by no outward sign the mental change she could not and must not understand; and had succeeded about as well as conscious efforts to be natural ever do. In truth, the young wife forgot that Meta was absolutely a child when she had last seen the two together, and had been struck by the studied consideration and courtesy that mingled with Ethert's simple and sincere affection for his orphan charge; nor could she have anticipated the change of his manner towards the girl of fourteen, remembering as she did the unchanged character of their own affectionate and confidential friendship till within a few weeks of their marriage. Needless to say that the existence of a somewhat similar reason for his altered bearing towards Meta never occurred to her.

"I thought," was her first reflection, "he

would have been so pleased to see her, so glad to have her company again for the very little time he has to spare; and he seems as if he hardly cared, as if she were no longer to him anything of what she used to be."

This reflection, made or rather flashing through her mind in the moment when Ivy watched her husband's brief greetings, was interrupted. She had shrunk into the background; and he, observing this instantly, with even more of earnest consideration than of formal courtesy, interposed at once to restore her to her fitting place.

"Mother, if I ask you to love my wife for my sake, it is but for a moment. No one can know Ivy and not learn to love her for her own."

A happy bride might have taken the compliment for granted; a more exacting or more critical nature might have found the phrase commonplace, the appeal perhaps a little derogatory to her dignity. But to Ivy's ear, one word was so significant that the rest mattered little. That word, so often and so resolutely avoided, now so warmly spoken, was sweet and precious to her beyond description. Her

wounded heart and humbled spirit were unspeakably soothed and comforted when she, who had dreaded yet more her husband's grave tone of distant courtesy than the cold glance of the stern unloving eyes it would draw upon her, she who had pleaded so piteously that her sorrow or humiliation should not be exposed to their scrutiny, felt herself drawn forward for the first time within her husband's arm to be presented to her formidable guest in language that was almost fond, and by the name she had longed for in vain.

“My wife!”

The rush of emotion produced by that one word, spoken in his voice, in a tone not of reluctant acknowledgment but of firm assertion, of voluntary kindness, almost overpowered her self-possession. She understood even what was not soft or tender in his manner; a certain emphasis of determination—felt that he desired to affirm her claims against the possibility of neglect or disparagement.

Ethert had determined that his mother's contempt for the parents should not be extended to the daughter. She might think

what she chose of the strange and hasty marriage, but it should not affect her reception of one who was as much as himself the victim of selfish exaction. And his purpose was at once secured. Ivy alone could perceive the only symptom that belied the earnestness of his words and demeanour; the absence of personal feeling in the caress evinced when the fingers forbore to close on the soft slender form that the arm embraced so closely.

Mrs. Glynne had known Ethert's ways too long and too intimately to assume that this introduction by any means disproved his aversion to the sudden and inexplicable union; but she saw at once that he would never enlighten her on the subject. Whether he loved or hated his young wife, he was obviously resolute to maintain before all others her right to a wife's privilege, a wife's position in the family of which he was the chief, a wife's place everywhere—save it might be in his own heart. The mother understood her son far too well not

to accept at once and implicitly the view he chose to present.

It might have seemed less necessary to conform carefully to his tone and attitude had she believed more confidently in the thorough sincerity of his language. He might have been bitterly hurt by a slight in which conjugal love would have made him a sharer; an affront to a lady he did not love, but whose dignity was in his charge, he would resent with the unforgiving sternness of those for whom resentment is a point of honour.

Ivy had not believed that her aunt's greeting could have been so cordial, so nearly affectionate; and her simple unsuspecting nature was forced to suppose that Mrs. Glynne had no conception of the real manner in which her son's marriage had been effected.

Then Ethert turned to Meta, drawing her forward with one hand while still holding his wife with the other.

"Meta, if Lady Glynne had forgotten her own child-companion, she would be kind to mine."

Of all who heard it Ivy was the most surprised and the most hurt by the form of the commendation. The mother was simply baffled ; unable to divine whether dread of Ivy's jealousy or consciousness of memories that might have excused it, love for and pride in his wife or a resolve to exaggerate the outward consideration that might conceal their absence, had prompted a tone so unusual ; or what other motive could have induced Ethert so studiously to define the new relation of those who had last met on equal terms as almost equally children. She understood Ethert's temper, like her own only when intensely embittered, well enough to comprehend how likely he was in torturing himself to torture those he best loved. She guessed too that an unloving marriage would not make him cling the more fondly to other and earlier attachments, but simply sear his heart against all affection.

Meta was for a moment keenly mortified, feeling Ethert's determination to mark the distinction between the wife and the childish *protégée* ; but she felt it chiefly as reminding her

that her guardian's wife was no longer her equal playmate; and if hurt, dreamed not for a moment of being angry with him for what she supposed to be prompted by a simple sense of duty. She could not like any one who stood between her and Ethert; but her love had been too childish, not indeed to admit of jealousy—children can be well nigh as jealous as women—but to allow of any sentimental self-conscious pain or offence.

Wholly unaware of the half-real, half-fanciful sentiment in regard to the future that had mingled in his genuine present affection for her, her strongest feeling was a disposition to resent by accepting with even exaggerated and formal submission, the pretension which as she supposed Ivy had asserted through her husband to the superiority of matronhood, of rank and age. Needless to say that Ivy had no such thought, that she was prepared to welcome her friend of some three years back as simply, warmly, frankly as ever, and that the manner in which Ethert reminded both of their altered position only startled and embarrassed her. But while attending her guests to their rooms

she exerted herself to the utmost to set Meta, who seemed even more constrained with her than with Ethert—and was really much more so, since she recognized no change in Ethert save the formality of that re-introduction—thoroughly at her ease.

On her return to the drawing-room she had to devote herself to her aunt, interchanging with her slow brief sentences that left her still able to turn her thoughts and eyes elsewhere from time to time. Thus she caught her husband's look fixed upon Meta as the latter sat at some little distance from all the rest.

The force of suppressed feeling betrayed in that look perplexed and almost alarmed her; not that she misconstrued or mistrusted the depth and warmth of Ethert's affection for his ward, but that she could not conceive the motive for its stringent repression. Unhappy enough to dread new trouble in everything she could not understand, to connect with herself every sign of constraint or dissatisfaction in her husband's demeanour, she would have drawn auguries of comfort from a frank display of his

pleasure in Meta's visit; she was frightened by a look which evinced more of pain and bitterness than either of affection or interest. There were actual tears in Ethert's eyes, the first she had ever seen there, and an expression of sternness in the whole countenance which she was well assured was not intended for or provoked by Meta.

What could have induced him to receive at first so coldly, to introduce in a manner almost suggestive of slight or warning, one from whom his regard had certainly not been withdrawn? And why was Meta herself so silent, so depressed; so unlike not only the bright self-reliant companion of the pleasant hours they had spent alone together or with Ethert and Charlie, but even the child, cowed indeed into quietude, but evidently repressed with difficulty and ever restless under repression, that she remembered so well in the chilling atmosphere of what had seemed to her her aunt's downright tyranny?

Ivy could not but fret under the necessity which compelled her to give her chief attention to her aunt, so anxious was she to talk to,

to cheer, to make Meta feel, as she said to herself, "at home with us;" consciously from affection and sympathy for her friend, unconsciously perhaps from a timid, anxious hope that, assured of her own kindness and of Meta's comfort and satisfaction therein, Ethert might be pleased with her; might at least speak and act naturally, without the guarded reserve which, as the look she had surprised assured her, was intentionally assumed, and assumed, if not for her sake, yet from some motive that regarded herself.

"Meta must think," Ivy said to herself, "that she is not so welcome to Ethert as she expected to be. Perhaps, though, it is only what will seem natural to her, that he is anxious about his mother, and, she will fancy, more occupied with me. But I do wish she understood how little I can be changed to her, not as if I must feel something so different, so much older and so much less her friend and companion now that—and she called me Lady Glynne; but I dare say that was my aunt's doing; it was quite like *her*." And Ivy's heart almost sank. She

could not repent, but the duty she had undertaken so loyally did seem hard and alarming to her, as she became conscious of the cloud of oppression and formality that her aunt's presence must bring over a life sufficiently clouded already.

“We must make her welcome, must get her to stay as long as London doctors can do her any good, or as she can enjoy Ethert's company; and—oh dear! what shall I do with her?”

CHAPTER IX.

IN PACEM.

IT was an infinite relief to Ivy's mind when, the next morning, Mrs. Glynne, with sufficient consideration and kindness, but quite distinctly, made evident her wish to dispense with the company of her daughter-in-law in her visit to the skilled specialist to whose professional care she had been recommended.

"Ethert will take me there, if you can spare him, Ivy; and I hope we shall not detain your carriage a couple of hours at most—unless, indeed, it take Ethert on to the city?"

"Will you, Ethert?" the young wife said. She had almost let slip the fact that Ethert had never availed himself of the convenience

or luxury appropriated with careful exclusiveness to her own use, and felt how natural and yet how unfortunate such a slip would have been.

"I shall walk, thank you," he answered. "I should get very little exercise, Ivy, if I allowed your consideration to deprive me of the walk to and fro which is all I do get."

"And Ivy," said her aunt, "I must not, will not keep you at home. I could not have accepted your invitation to burden you with the formal duties of a hostess towards an invalid. You must consider Meta and the day at your own disposal, as if I were not here. Ethert, you will take care that your wife takes me at my word?"

Ivy felt it difficult to do this. Yet she read in Ethert's face the conviction that his mother meant what she said; that she would insist upon a condition that was no more than due to the young and inexperienced girl who had volunteered so dutifully a charge which might have been made a most wearisome burden. She delighted in the prospect of having Meta's

company, of enjoying for several hours of each solitary day the society of a friend, not indeed of her own age, but by intelligence, liveliness, and spirit capable of almost equal companionship.

“Ethert,” said his mother when they were alone in the carriage, “I am not at all sure that I have done well in yielding to your and Meta’s entreaties. That the best medical advice in London can be of service to me I do not believe; but I wished so much to see you once more, to have one glimpse of the home you have—of your home, and to see with you the daughter-in-law who wrote to me so kindly, so dutifully. But I am afraid I have run a risk which may be cruel to her.”

“To her, mother? Nothing would have been so cruel to Ivy as if you had made her feel that you would not accept from her what was so plainly the duty of a daughter.”

“Ivy,” she answered, lapsing into the same cold, grave tone as of old, suppressing or merely cooling from the warmer

feeling that had softened it in her first words, "Ivy is evidently sensitive and impressible, as she is very young even for her years. She has seen death; but from what you have written to me I gather that she has seen little of pain. And if I can, Ethert, I should wish to return home in time; but till I hear what Sir B. C. may say I do not know how long a time may be given me."

"Mother," said Ethert, greatly startled and deeply shocked, "I hope, I must believe there can be no ground for such fears. But you cannot mean that if it were so, if there were danger so immediate, you could dream of wishing to leave us on that account?"

"Not to leave *you*, Ethert. Both as a man and as a son, I have a right to expect from you the courage and the kindness to bear what may be a painful trial as well as a trouble. And," she added more gently, "I do not think it would be a kindness to you to spare you that. But I do feel that it is hardly right to

inflict on Ivy what may seriously affect her health and spirits.

“My son, you know I have never flinched from any inevitable prospect any more than from a painful duty. I have always, thank God, been able to look firmly in the face the worst He may be pleased to send me, and you cannot think that for my own sake I have anything to fear. There has never been an hour in the last thirty years when, except for your sake, and later for Meta’s, the tidings I expect to hear confirmed to-day would not have had more of relief, of comfort, I might almost say of joy, than of terror. That utter loneliness, utter weariness of life is the price I pay for the two years of such happiness as I think are not often given to women like myself, with little of that softness that men so prize in us; and,” she added with momentary passion—while looking with unusually earnest affection into her face, Ethert’s eyes or fancy saw it almost transfigured into tenderness and comparative youthfulness as she spoke—“they were well worth the cost. If I were sure that I am to

rejoin your father, I could only be impatient for the hour, through whatever anguish it may come. And if not, what can you suppose there has been in my life for thirty years that I should be sorry to leave? Spare me and yourself those affectations or exaggerations which the world thinks becoming in these matters. No one can grieve very deeply to part with me—I cannot help feeling that I have not deserved that they should. I allowed myself to be so hardened, so chilled by that one wrench to my heart-strings, that I have never felt or shown that tenderness which wins the love as it is necessary to the happiness of children. I was conscious of that when I saw how little reluctant you were to go to school, how completely your return to me in the holidays, your preference of the Lakes to Glynnehurst was a matter of duty, or of affection for the place; and when you asked me to take charge of Meta, I told you that I undertook such a task most unwillingly. I doubted my fitness, my power to fulfil it. I could not say so much on that subject

then as I can now. When so brief a space of life remains, one cares little to conceal what it might not be so well to speak if our relations had long to last; and I felt then—I have felt more and more deeply since—that I was even less fit to make life bright and happy to a girl than to form the character of a boy.”

Ethert understood for the first time what had been the motive of that which had seemed to him a somewhat selfish, unkindly reluctance to accept the charge of a solitary orphan; a mere shrinking from trouble. He recalled to mind how unwillingly his mother had yielded to his entreaties, how decisive at last had been the consideration that no other refuge but the utter dreariness of an orphan asylum was open to the child; and remembered with keen penitence how completely he had misunderstood her, how much injustice he had done to what proved to have been a cold, somewhat hard, but practical sense of duty, and even a feeling of kindness.

Their conversation was cut short here.

Ethert's engagements would not allow him to wait for the conclusion of his mother's interview with the physician or to escort her on her return; and he felt more or less consciously that it would be easier to her to tell and for him to hear the verdict, when some hours should have elapsed after it had been hinted probably rather than announced to her whom it immediately concerned.

Ivy meantime had been not a little disappointed in that sole enjoyment of Meta's company to which she had so eagerly looked forward. Not that the presence of such a companion was not a very welcome change from the solitude of her usual life, a most grateful contrast to the awkward and tedious duty which she had anticipated with an alarm she strove to repress with all her power of will, as unkind and unfeeling. But it was impossible to revive at once the pleasant sense of affectionate ease, of frank native confidence that had existed between the child of eleven and the young girl of fourteen, scarcely less childish. There was nothing of sullenness,

little even of coldness in Meta's reserve; but that it was reserve, even when Ivy's kindness was most fully recognized, was uncomfortably apparent. There was no longer the unconscious simple freedom, the sense of equality in childhood, too equal to entertain the idea of distinction of years or social position. In its stead there was a conscious acknowledgment of kindness received, that in itself mortified and chilled Ivy's affectionate impulses; a tone of deference and respect, whether to the young matron and hostess or to the wife of her own guardian and benefactor, that was not less manifest even when, in compliance with Ivy's express deprecation, it was not evinced in set formal thanks or in the name whose employment marked so forcibly Meta's sense of their altered relation. Not that Meta would not talk, and talk with almost as much freedom and liveliness, with even more intelligence than of old; but she would talk only as the conversation was led by her companion, and avoided carefully and absolutely all expression of her own feelings, all reference to her own daily life, except in so far as it concerned

the protectress for whose health she was deeply and avowedly anxious; though neither of the girls was at all aware how severe and hopeless was the suffering, how near and how sure the end.

Ivy was not surprised that her aunt volunteered no account of her visit to the physician, and scarcely answered, except in such phrases as courtesy required, her own timid and hesitating enquiries. But it was not a little strange to her that Meta herself hardly ventured on a question, and even when she had been left for an hour alone with Mrs. Glynne seemed to know no more, though her fears were evidently more distinct and deeper than before. But though at first rather repelled than encouraged, Ivy's attentions were so kind, so constant, so unobtrusive, her dutiful regard for Ethert's mother, her anxious care for the invalid guest, so simply, so naturally manifested, that, almost in her own despite, her aunt's manner could not but soften towards her. Whether from a sort of cold consideration characteristic of her nature, or from some sense of the necessity of solitude to herself,

the sufferer chose to remain much alone, leaving Meta with her hostess. But gradually her thanks for each kindly service rendered, her answer to each timid enquiry, became less formal and more kindly; and Ivy was almost as much surprised as gratified when, on the fourth evening of their stay, her aunt's "good night" was accompanied by a caressing touch smoothing her dark curls, such as she had never seen bestowed even on Ethert or Meta.

"Good night. You have been very good to me, my child; and Ethert is more fortunate than—Ivy, I am very glad to have seen you; God send you the happiness you deserve!"

There was something of sadness and doubt, nothing of enquiry, in the maternal blessing. In truth, a woman's keen perception had enabled Mrs. Glynne to draw inferences she would not on any account have betrayed to Ivy, whether for Ethert's sake or for that of one whom, as Ethert had said, it was impossible—except for her husband—to know even for a short time, and not to love.

Prepared to dislike the daughter of parents she not merely disliked but cordially despised, to distrust the bride who must have been more or less forced upon her son, she had watched closely in the expectation of detecting rather the reason than the evidence of the coldness she suspected and almost assumed. She saw no fault, nothing that even jealous unfriendly construction could suppose a fault, on Ivy's part, no omission of kindness or courtesy on Ethert's; but she could observe what to a woman who had been, though long years before Ivy was born, passionately loved during a very brief but very happy union, was hardly other than conclusive proof of estrangement.

"Ivy," she said to herself, "is afraid—is ill at ease: and it is not mere native timidity, or even the shyness of a young bride, deepened by all that must have been strange and painful in the suddenness of her marriage. If she loves Ethert—and I think she does—she fears him; she feels no confidence in her own position, no hold on him; she dares not show affection even if she is con-

scious of it. She is strangely afraid of him, considering how confidently she used to rely on his kindness, and how fond he certainly was of her. And that is not the worst sign. Ethert would soon win her to perfect ease and confidence—if he chose. But he is as punctiliously courteous as if he hated her profoundly. In passion, if not in love, there is always something of roughness; and there is no shade of that—not so much as a touch, a look, that betrays love's consciousness of possession, manhood's sense of mastery—in Ethert's manner with her."

Wiser than her sister-in-law, she knew that a word, a hint to her son could only tend to anger him: and that his anger must, intentionally or not, be ultimately visited upon Ivy. If she had pity, sorrow for either of the young couple so strangely forced together, it was not her son that she most compassionated, it was not Ivy that she was inclined, however lightly, to censure.

Ivy had no opportunity of conversation with Ethert on the evening of the first visit to the physician; was never alone with him till

the fifth day of her aunt's stay; when after taking leave of his mother and Meta for the evening as he was about to depart to his usual work, he turned to her without the formality whereto she was now so accustomed that it had ceased to pain her as at first; with an abruptness which in that presence she felt as a distinct kindness, an inverted mark of consideration for her feelings, perhaps of compliance with her request.

“Ivy, I want you.”

She followed him into his study and stood silent, a little surprised and waiting somewhat timidly to understand the meaning of the summons.

“Will you sit down? I have little time to spare, but what I have to say will I am afraid trouble you not a little, and I must not startle you if I can help it.”

“Oh, Ethert!—have I done anything?” her first thought turning at once to the probability of some offence unconsciously given by herself—a symptom too significant not to annoy him.

"Ivy, do you ever 'do anything'—you had better not have done? Have you ever given me occasion of displeasure, or have I ever seemed to think so?"

"Then," she said, remembering suddenly a letter she had seen in her mother's handwriting among those she had laid out for him on the breakfast-table, "Ethert, is anything the matter with Mamma?"

He hesitated, and she repeated her question in a still more anxious, almost excited tone.

"No, no, Ivy; and I am very sorry I cannot show you her letter. I know it does not seem kind."

"But, Ethert, you never do show me your letters — and I do wish you would read mine."

"This one was entirely on business; the only one, I think, that has been written to me, and not to you. But it was not of her that I had to speak—Ivy, my mother has proposed to leave us."

She looked up, startled in spite of his endeavour to avoid surprising or alarming her,

and once more afraid that some error of her own was the cause of an incident which, as he announced it, seemed to have disturbed him even more seriously than she could understand at once.

“Ethert, why? If she is not comfortable here, if I have seemed to neglect her, indeed I have done my best; it was her own doing; I tried to do what she wished or said she wished.”

“Don’t distress yourself in this way, Ivy. Why should you, who have never yet deserved or received a reproof, a word of distrust or censure, fancy yourself to blame, or likely to be blamed, as soon as anything goes amiss? As you know that you have done your best—most patiently and most devotedly—your nervous excuses sound like reproaches to me; show that you expect me to be unjust. And yet—have I ever found or hinted a fault?—as I said before, I could in no case have the right.”

“Ethert, that is the reason. As you would not speak if you were angry, I never feel sure——”

“Trust your own heart, Ivy. My mother speaks of you as you deserve; it is for your sake, it is to spare you, that she wishes to leave us. She thinks, it may be with reason, that in a few days more she might not be able to do so; and that—what may come at any time, and must come very soon, would try you more than she is willing to do.”

“Ethert, you don’t mean that she is...in danger...and that if she were—she would leave us? She has been so calm; and though she did—has seemed to suffer, she has said nothing. Surely she could not be...?”

“You do not know her, Ivy. She has more firmness, more courage, more power of self-suppression than I have seen in any one else—with one exception; more than any *man*, but one, I know. But she does suffer fearfully. It is for that reason, I fancy, that she insists so much on being alone, that she will not allow you to give her more of a presence that she prizes, Ivy, very highly. And she knows, she has been told, that she has not long to suffer.”

Having had little experience of her husband's character since old enough to observe it, and as yet having scarcely seen him under trial that deeply affected his feelings without irritating his temper, Ivy totally failed to understand the depth and force of feeling that was marked only by a set sternness of look, a slow, deliberate, low utterance of words that seemed in themselves cold and indifferent. The announcement shocked her all the more for the apparent calmness with which it was conveyed, and some moments had passed before her agitation was sufficiently controlled to enable her to ask coherently and earnestly :

“But, Ethert, you will not let her go?”

“Not if I can help it—but, Ivy, it is for you she feels; and it is for you to tell her, if you choose, that her going would pain you more than anything that can happen.”

“But, Ethert, how can she think of such a thing? Not only would it be cruel to you, even to me, but how cruel to Meta!”

“Again you do not understand, Ivy. If she had gone, it was her wish to go without telling

any one but myself the truth, and to leave Meta with you. *That* I could not allow; but it is like her, and like, very like one other person I know; one who said to me: 'I understand so well the last feeling, the last impulse of the wild creatures; to run away and hide themselves to die—in secret.'"

"Ethert, what a horrible thought, what a dreadful wish for a human being—to wish to die alone, without care or pity or sympathy! Who could be so hard, so bitter?"

"One, Ivy, who has more softness of heart, at least for others, than many men and women of much softer manner; my chief, Lestrangle."

"He could not have meant it!" Ivy exclaimed, in utter horror; a horror deepened by her sense of Lestrangle's kindness to herself.

The thought was simply terrible to the young wife, clinging, dependent, and sympathetic by nature even more than the generality of her sex; and there was a certain intenser and profounder awe in her manner, still more in her spirit when, after Ethert had left her,

she returned to the room where now her aunt was alone.

The cold stern calmness with which the woman—accustomed so long to an almost solitary life, a life even when not actually lonely yet absolutely alone in the sense of exclusion from close human sympathy—suppressed all manifestation of feeling, made it seem almost impossible to Ivy to touch on the subject she could not leave unnoticed. Indeed she had hardly power of utterance, and she remained silent so long that Mrs. Glynne at last felt that it was easier for herself, strange and painful as the position was, to speak the first word; the more so that the agitation and distress she could not but perceive in Ivy's manner rendered it impossible for either to enter upon any indifferent topic.

“You tremble, my child; I am afraid Ethert has been inconsiderate and hasty. He has not learned from me to understand how women's feelings need to be spared.”

“Aunt, you could not expect him to think of mine when he.... Oh, is it true... that you have suffered so all this time and would not

let me know it . . . would not even let me try to comfort, if I could do nothing for you ?”

“You could have done nothing, dear child,” Mrs. Glynne answered; touched and moved by that simple, sincere, wondering compassion, less probably for her pain than for her loneliness of heart, as she had not, perhaps, been touched by human sympathy, moved by strong personal feeling, since the one great loss that had darkened her life. “And you do not know, you can hardly have seen as yet, and perhaps may never see, what such suffering is. I have done my best to spare even Meta that knowledge; and Meta could doubtless bear the sight more easily than you.”

“Oh, Aunt, how can you think so? She is like your own child!”

“Perhaps,” the other answered, with a deep sigh. “I am afraid my own child knew too little of a mother’s tenderness; and Meta has known nothing. I may wish perhaps, now, I had been less stern, had thought more of her present happiness, and not believed so confidently in the possibility

and wisdom of moulding her to what I thought something safer and stronger than the character that God had given her—of anticipating the discipline of the world. But Meta could only be shocked, grieved; she could not possibly feel the affection that, if it makes the sight of pain more painful perhaps at the moment, relieves, softens the impression on memory. No, Ivy! whether in fact or not, in feeling at any rate, those who have lived so much alone as I have must be content to suffer and to die alone. I know very well that you, like Ethert, thought me hard, almost cruel to Meta. Ivy, if she does not seem to feel much after the first surprise, remember that and do her justice.”

Intensely affected—less perhaps by the stern, strong sense of justice to others which was so thoroughly in keeping with a character wherein so much of masculine strength and masculine hardness mingled with and concealed what was truly womanly, than by the repentance equally manifest in the calm, sad tone as in the words; the melancholy acknow-

ledgment that the solitude of spirit now at last painfully felt had been bitterly deserved—Ivy looked with earnest, longing eyes, eager to afford consolation, if only she could know how, into the face from which till now she had generally shrunk with more or less of fear—fear so great as to produce all but dislike. So looking, she became aware of that which she had not previously noticed for want of sympathising scrutiny, the presence of sternly repressed pain.

“Aunt,” she said, bursting into tears, and finding in the intensity of her compassion courage for an open utterance of feeling which a few hours ago she could not have thought possible in that presence; clasping and supporting against her own the thin, wasted, quivering form, “how can you bear to think, to feel so? And you are wrong—Meta does love you. I remember Charlie said, when you could not come to Glynnehurst last year, he had begged Meta and Ethert to persuade you that she might come; and Meta would not, she said she ought not to leave you. Oh, Aunt Flora, do not think

we do not care, if...if we have not known how...what to say."

"I should be the last," Mrs. Glynne answered presently, returning the embrace with truer tenderness than she had often shown or perhaps felt, "I should be the last to mistake silence for want of feeling. And, Ivy—forgive me if I speak as if you could want counsel or warning where your husband is concerned—but do not forget that in his case. Not only is he my son, but in all that relates to self-control he is in great measure my pupil. Never suppose that he does not feel because he is silent. If Ethert feels anything so keenly that it really tries, tortures him, that it is painful, unbearably painful, he will avoid to speak of it at all. If a few days hence—Ivy, it can be no more!—you find that he does not speak of me, if from his words and manner, from his absorption in other things, his return to all the usual duties of his life, you would say to yourself that he did not remember or

that he never cared for me, then—my son loves me better than I have ever believed.”

The end of that strong, sad nature was as strange, as characteristic, as had been the life. Meta, whose room though close to Mrs. Glynne's did not communicate with it, had been too anxious to sleep soundly through the night, and had more than once crossed the passage to listen; but had heard no sound from within the chamber where, while she could raise herself from her bed to seek whatever she might require, Mrs. Glynne would allow no attendant to remain. She was startled by Ethert's step on the stair at his usual late, or rather early hour, when he was too near to allow her to retreat unobserved.

“Have you been with her?” he said in a low whisper.

“No,” Meta answered. “I dare not go in, but I have been listening; I have not heard her move— She would not like . . .”

“Has she been alone then all night,

Meta? I must take the responsibility if you chance to startle or awaken her. Go in, gently."

Meta obeyed, creeping in so quietly, with such anxious care not to disturb slumbers she knew to be light, that she dared not close the door. Ethert therefore, waiting for her report, was aware at once when no sound was heard within the room, when she did not return immediately, that something had occurred. The first object on which his eyes fell as he entered—Meta's slight white-robed form crouched together, seeming ready to sink to the ground, yet neither falling nor trembling, paralysed or frozen in that attitude by intense horror—prepared him for what he saw next. It was not with him as with her the first sight of death; but of death so occurring and so encountered few of us have had experience; few *men* have courage and consideration to die as the lonely woman had done. She lay as in sleep, the form rigid, however not yet with the stiffness of death, but with the strong effort that had restrained the convulsions of pain.

As in sleep—only, the face was set, the lips drawn tight over the hard-closed teeth, the hands—grasping one the post of the bed, the other a portrait attached around her neck by a black ribbon—were clenched as in the resolve to control the spasm of suffering, or the cry that might naturally have revealed it and alarmed the house. Perhaps from a strange kind of personal sensitiveness, shrinking from exhibiting to others a spectacle of suffering she could not wholly control, perhaps as much from genuine desire to spare the feelings of a girl so young as Meta, and one so intensely sensitive as Ivy, the invalid had chosen deliberately to pass through the last mortal agony in absolute silence and solitude.

To Meta the mercy was perhaps doubtful. The shock might have been less had she been allowed to watch over and to soothe the suffering of those long days and nights. But from the time when her pain first became unendurable, and her fate to her own mind certain, Ethert learnt that his mother had studiously excluded her adopted child on

every occasion when the severity of her suffering must have made itself evident. Meta therefore was taken utterly by surprise, except in so far as her own observation had prepared her, not for so sudden and terrible an end, but for the possibility of a final sinking that might be, probably was, not very remote.

Ivy's feeling was perhaps less grief than intense pity, a pity which none could feel so deeply as the only person who had received anything like confidence from the sufferer in her last days; to whom alone she had betrayed the true woman's heart concealed, almost crushed, under the effort to sustain utterly alone the burden of lifelong sorrow. Warned by his mother's words, she watched closely, though careful that he should not detect her watching, Ethert's manner and bearing. Depression, sadness he could not wholly conceal. He was silent, often absent as he had never been before. But even during the few days when a conventional propriety he would not violate detained him from his usual occupation, he took up as earnestly as

ever his favourite studies or the most pressing part of the work he could do at home. It was only such close observation as hers that could have detected the slight but significant symptoms which belied his quietude—the repeated turning back to pages read in vain while the mind was elsewhere—the sudden start and shudder that told to what idea of horror it had wandered—the absolute unnatural abstinence from the subject uppermost in all their thoughts, which must be frequently forced on his. Above all, the preference for solitude that, but for the suggestion of the dead, would have seemed to Ivy a fresh and most painful proof of estrangement from herself, and which surprised and pained even Meta, betrayed the real intensity of sorrow proved only by its severe repression; the depth of feelings which almost any other man or woman would have felt it a relief to show and share, which those who are much less affected by them think it decent to display.

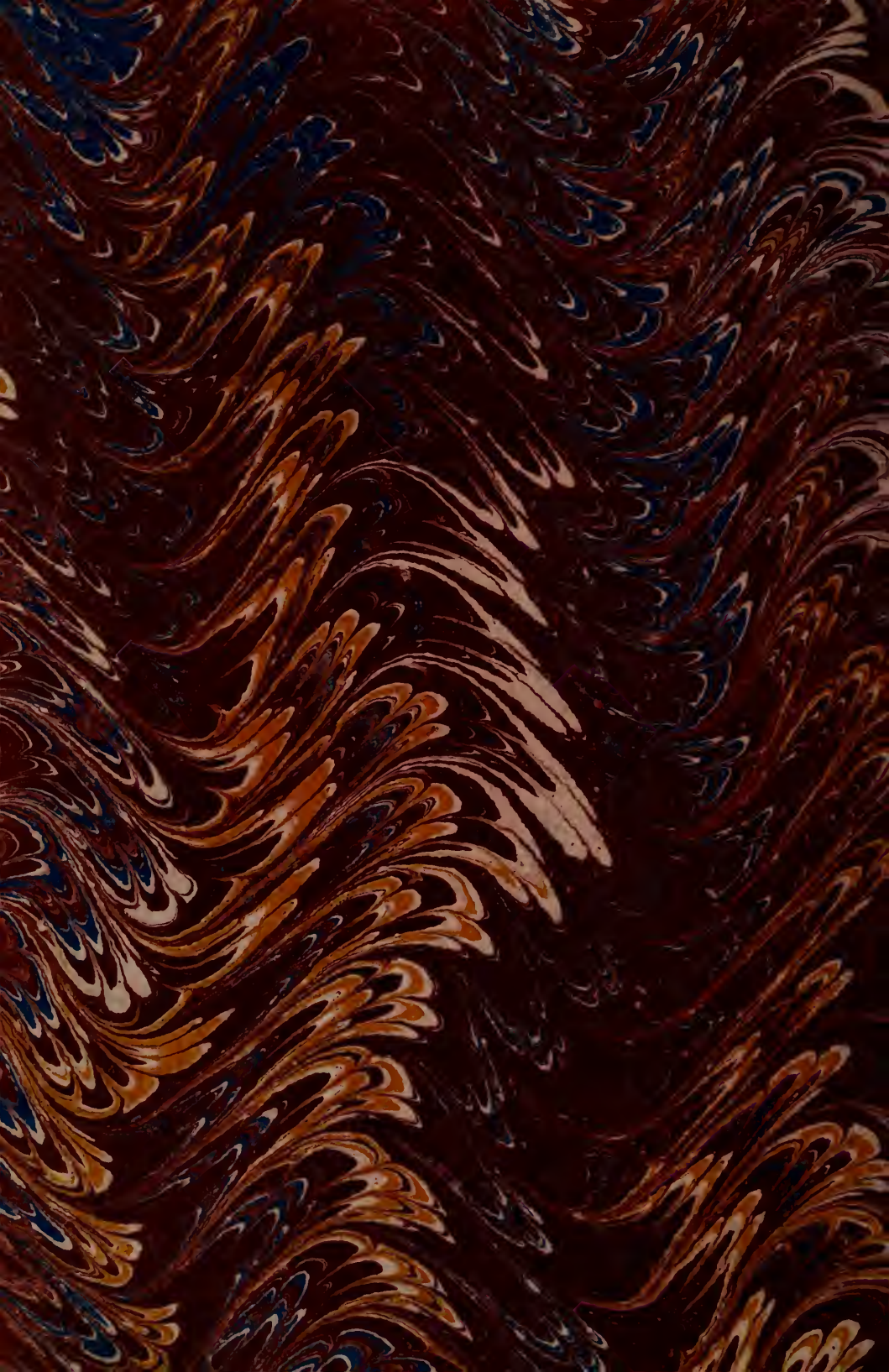
These days gave her a totally new insight into her husband's character—into that side of

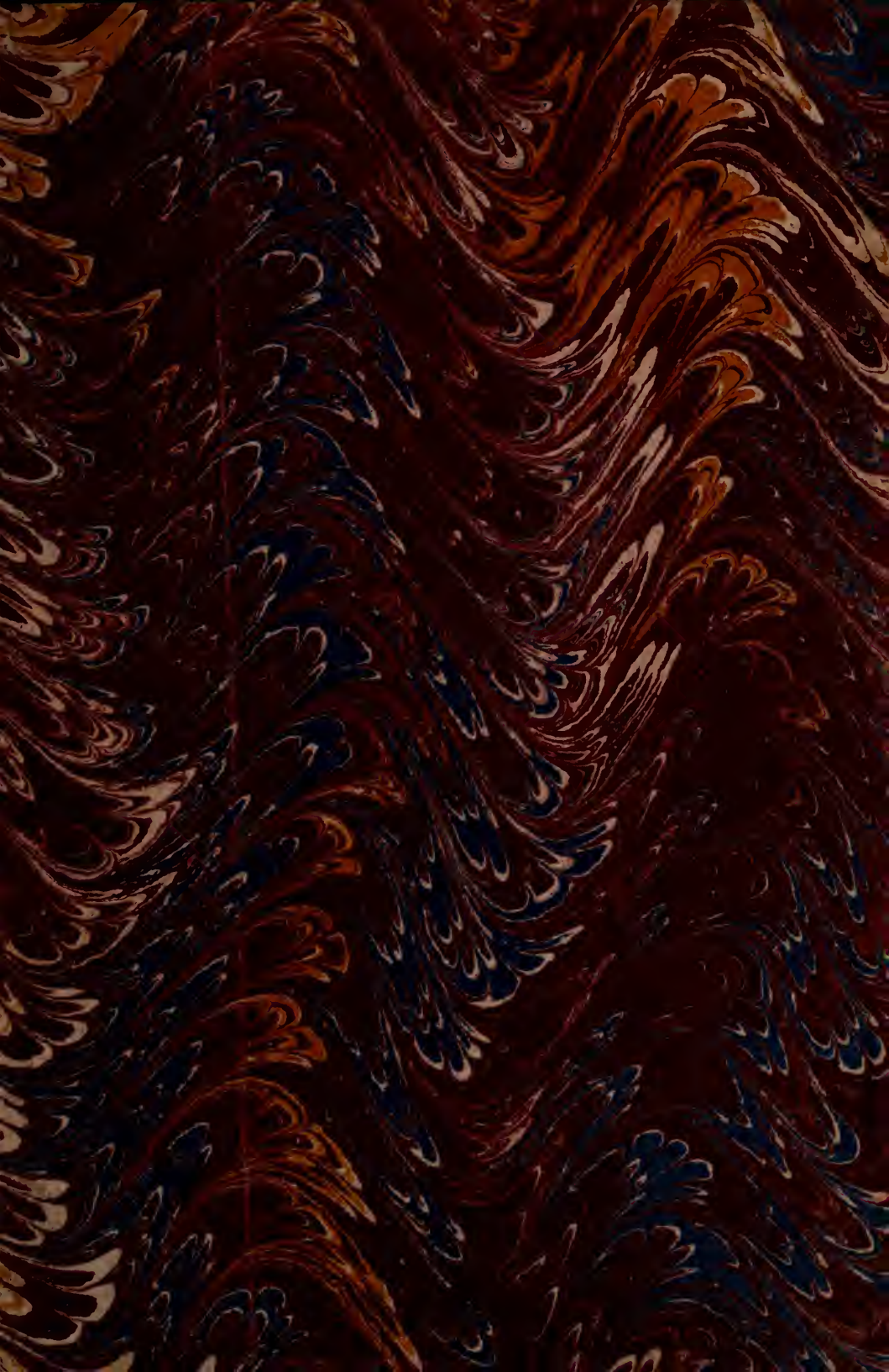
it which so signally resembled the nature of the only parent he had ever known. It troubled her sorely, deeply tried her loving, pitying spirit, that in this steady repression of all emotion, this affectation, if not of indifference, yet of absolute composure, there was nothing that that seemed to invite, nothing that gave her courage to offer comfort or sympathy. Only once, when for the last time Ethert led in Meta to look on the face scarcely softened in death, with whose stern expression they were both so familiar, did his wife find an opportunity of tendering a proof that she could understand and would have wished to share his sorrow.

She had stolen into the room to place at that last moment a little bouquet of her own favourite lily flowers on the still breast; and when she had done so, looking up into his face, which bore at that moment a resemblance she had never noticed before to that now about to disappear for ever from their eyes, something in its expression seemed to demand, at least to excuse her intervention. As Ivy placed her hand on his, Meta in-

stinctively released that which she held; and not she but his wife drew him from the room which he would not enter again while those remains were still present with them.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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